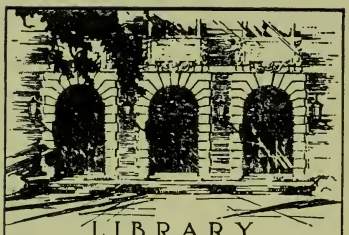
The Man with a Shadow

By

A. Maxwell Scott



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THE
MAN WITH A SHADOW

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN,

AUTHOR OF "ONE MAID'S MISCHIEF," "THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES." "DOUBLE CUNNING," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE MAN WITH A SHADOW.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNSUITABLE MESSENGER.

"HARTLEY, you horrify me," said Mary, after she had listened to her brother's account of his visit. "He must have been ill or under some strange influence."

"Influence?" cried Salis drily; "well, that means drink, Mary."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried the poor girl warmly. "He told you he was ill, and he may have been taking some very potent medicine."

"Extremely," said Salis.

"Hartley, for shame!" cried Mary, with her eyes flashing. "You left here an hour ago full of faith and trust in the friend of

many years' standing. You find him ill and peculiar in his manner, and you come back here ready to think all manner of evil of him. Is this just?"

"But he was so very strange and peculiar, my child. You cannot imagine how queer."

"Hartley!" cried Mary warmly; "how can you! Horace North must be very ill, and needs his friend's help. Your account of his acts and words suggests delirium. Go back to him at once."

"Go back to him?"

"Yes; at once. Have you forgotten his goodness to us—how he snatched Leo back from the jaws of death?"

"You think I ought to go, Mary?" said Salis dubiously.

"I shall think my brother is under some strange influence — suffering from wounded pride—if he does not frankly go to our old friend's help."

"I'll go back at once," cried Salis excitedly. "Why, Mary, when you were active and strong, I always thought I had to teach and take care of you. Now you

are an invalid, you seem to teach and guide me."

"No, no," said Mary tenderly. "It is only that I lie here for many hours alone, thinking of what is best for us all. Not yet, Hartley: I want to say something else."

"Yes," he said, going down on one knee by her couch, and holding her hand; "what is it?"

"I want to say a few words to you about Leo," said Mary, after a pause.

"About Leo?" said Salis uneasily.

"Yes, dear. I tell you I lie here for many hours thinking about you both. I want to speak about Leo and—Mr. North."

"Yes," said Salis gravely, as Leo's manner when the servant came from the Hall flashed upon his mind. "What do you wish to say?"

"Do you consider that there is any engagement between them?"

"I hardly know what to say. North seemed deeply attached to her."

"Yes," said Mary; "but I have felt puzzled by his manner lately. He has not been."

"And he has not sent her flowers as he used."

"No; I have noticed that. Has Mr. North felt that Leo has slighted him in any way?"

"Why, Mary," cried Salis excitedly, "what a brain you have! My dear child, you have hit upon the cause of his strange manner. You noticed—you noticed Leo's manner when the news came of Candlish's illness—for I suppose I must call it so."

"Yes," said Mary, with a sigh. "I noticed it."

"And North must have seen something. Mary, my girl, what shall I do?"

"What shall you do?"

"Yes; I am divided between my sister and my friend. There! I must speak out. It would be the saving of Leo if she could become North's wife; and yet, much as I love her and wish for her happiness, I feel as if I am being unjust to North to let matters go farther."

Mary lay back with her eyes half closed for some minutes before she felt that she

could trust her voice so that it should not betray her.

"It would be for Leo's happiness could she say truly that she could love and honour Horace North," Mary whispered at last; "but it will never be, Hartley. Leo will never marry as we wish."

"I'm afraid not," said Salis sadly; "and the more I think of it, the more it seems to me that you have hit upon North's trouble. Leo's anxiety about that scoundrel has disgusted poor Horace. What shall I do?"

"Your friend is ill," said Mary sadly; "act as a friend should. Leave the rest: we can do nothing there."

"My poor darling!" said Salis, "you are the good angel of our little home. There, I'll go to North at once."

Meanwhile a conversation was going on in Leo's room.

She had suffered intensely during the past few days, which had seemed to her like months of suspense and agony. Every stroke at the door had seemed to be a visitor to expose her to her brother, or else she believed

it was North coming to reproach her; and, though she told herself that she would be defiant and could tell him he was mad ever to have thought about her, she shivered at each step upon the gravel.

The scene in the vestry had shaken her nerves terribly. The news of Tom Candlish's serious injuries had added to her trouble; and, combined with this, there was the horrible suspense as to her lover's state. In a way, she was a prisoner, and any attempt to hear news of the sufferer at the Hall would bring down upon her an angry reproof from her brother.

After the news of his state, Tom Candlish's name was not mentioned at the Rectory. She dared not ask or show by word or look the anxiety she felt, and yet there were times when she would have given years of her life for a few words of tidings.

Unable to bear the suspense any longer, and after thinking of a dozen schemes, she at last decided upon one, which was the most unlucky she could have devised.

It was the nearest to her hand, and, in

quite a gambling spirit, she snatched at it recklessly.

She was in her room, reading, when Dally entered.

"Is my brother in?" she said quietly.

"Yes, miss; along with Miss Mary, talking."

"Are you very busy, Dally?"

"Yes, miss, 'most worked to death," said the girl tartly.

"But a walk would do you good, Dally. Would you take a note for me?"

"Take a note, miss?" said Dally with her eyes twinkling; "oh, of course, miss! I'll go and ask Miss Mary to let me go!"

"No, no—stop, you foolish girl!" said Leo, with a half laugh. "There, I'll be plain with you. I don't want my sister to know. You would take a letter for me to Mrs. Berens, Dally?"

"Master said I was never to take any notes for anybody," said Dally sharply.

"But you will make an exception, Dally! Take a note for me, and bring me an answer, and I will give you a sovereign."

"To Mrs. Berens, miss?"

Leo looked at her meaningly, and the girl returned the gaze.

"Very well, miss; I'll take it," she said. "Must I go right to the Hall?"

"Yes, Dally, this evening, and nobody must know. Insist upon seeing him yourself, and bring me back an answer by word of mouth, if he cannot write."

"Yes, miss."

"Can I trust you?"

"Trust me, miss? Why, of course!" cried Dally, for Leo was giving her the opportunity she had sought. For days past she had been trying to find some way of getting a word with Tom Candlish; but, so far, it had been impossible. Now the way had been put into her hands.

"Thankye, miss," she said, dropping a curtsy, as she slipped a long letter and a sovereign into her pocket. "And if I don't settle your affair there, madam," she said to herself, "I don't know Tom Candlish, and he don't know quite what Dally Watlock can do when she's served like this."

"Then I may trust you, Dally?" whispered Leo.

"Trust me, miss?" said the girl, looking at her innocently; "why, of course you can."

"To-night, then, after dark!"

"Yes, miss, after dark; and if I'm asked for, you'll say you give me leave to go and see poor gran'fa, who isn't well."

"Yes, Dally, I will."

"And she's been to boarding school, and thinks herself clever," said Dally, as soon as she was alone. "Go after dark, miss? Yes, I will. They say people's soft when they're sick and weak. Perhaps so. Tom may be so now. After dark!" she muttered with a little cough. "Yes, miss; you may trust me! I'll go after dark!"

CHAPTER II.

MRS. BERENS IS WOUNDED.

"Is anything the matter, Mrs. Berens?"

"Matter, my dear Mary?" said the lady, in a piteous voice. "Oh, yes; but how beautiful and soft and patient you look!"

She bent down and kissed the invalid, sighed, and wafted some scent about the room.

"I'm a great deal worried, dear, about money matters, and—and other things."

"Money, Mrs. Berens? I thought you were rich."

"Not rich, dear, but well off. But money is a great trouble; for Mr. Thompson, my agent in London, worries me a great deal, investing and putting it for me somewhere

else. He says I am wasting my opportunities—that he could double my income; and when he comes down, really, my dear, his attentions are too marked for those of a solicitor."

"Mr. Thompson is a relative of Dr. North, is he not?" said Mary gravely.

"Yes; he asked Dr. North to introduce him, and the doctor did," said Mrs. Berens ruefully. "But it was not about the money; it was about Dr. North himself I came to speak."

"Indeed!" said Mary, with a faint tinge of colour showing.

"Yes, my dear; and I don't want you to think me a busybody, but I could not help noticing that he seemed attached to Leo; and it is troubling me for Leo's sake."

"Will you speak plainly, Mrs. Berens?"

"Yes, dear; but you frighten me—you are so severe. There! I will speak out! Leo is engaged to Dr. North, is she not?"

"No," said Mary, after a pause; "there is no engagement."

"Ah, then that makes it not quite so bad."

"Mrs. Berens!"

"Oh, don't be so severe, Mary. I was poorly yesterday — a little hysterical — the weather; and I sent for Dr. North."

"Yes."

"He came, dear, and no medical man could have been nicer than he was at first; but all at once he seemed to change—to become as if he were two people!"

"Mrs. Berens!"

"Yes, dear. I did not know what to make of him. He was like one possessed, my dear!"

"Mrs. Berens!"

"Yes, dear; it's quite true. One minute he was sympathetic and kind, and the next laughing at and bantering me in a strange tone."

"You must be mistaken."

"No, my dear. He told me it was all nonsense, and that I was as hearty as a brick. What an expression to use to a lady! And then he apologised, and spoke calmly, giving me excellent advice."

Mary wiped the dew from her white forehead.

"And then, my dear," continued Mrs. Berens, "directly after he called me his pretty buxom widow. I felt as if I should sink through the floor with indignant shame."

"Are you not mistaken, Mrs. Berens?" said Mary, whose voice grew tremulous and almost inaudible.

"Mistaken, my dear? Oh, no; that is what he said; and then he seemed to feel ashamed of it, and I saw him colour up."

"It seems impossible," muttered Mary; and then she recalled her brother's words, and a hand seemed to clutch her heart.

"Of course," continued Mrs. Berens, "I could not order him to leave the house; I could only look at him indignantly."

"And he apologised?" said Mary eagerly.

"Apologised? No, my dear; he made matters worse by his low bantering—chaff, young men call it—till my face burned, and I felt so shocked that I was ready to burst into tears. For I always did like Dr. North. Such a straightforward, gentlemanly man. You always felt such confidence in him."

Mary looked at her wildly.

"Oh, no, my dear," continued her visitor, taking her look as a question; "nothing of the kind. I should have smelt him directly. He kissed me. He had not been drinking. And it's so horrible, for I could never call him in again."

"Hush!" whispered Mary. "Pray don't speak of it before my brother."

"Before your brother! Oh, no, my dear. I should sink with shame. But why did you say that?"

"Because he might come in, and I must think about it all before I mention it to him."

"But—but Mr. Salis——"

"My brother is not out."

"Not out? I understood your maid to say he had gone to the church," cried Mrs. Berens, starting up in alarm.

She was too late, for directly after Salis entered, with the presentation surplice over his arm.

Some one turned red in the face. It may have been Mrs. Berens, or it may have been

Salis; and, in either case, the colour was reflected. Certainly both looked warm.

Salis was the first to recover his equanimity and greet the visitor.

"I did not know you had company, Mary," he said. "I was going to ask you to alter the buttons at the neck of this. It is too tight."

"Then you are going to wear it?" said Mary, with the first display of malicious fun that had shone in her eyes since her accident.

"Wear it? Well, yes; I suppose I must," said Salis gruffly. "I can't afford to buy myself a new one. Only a beggarly, hard-up curate, you see, Mrs. Berens."

"Oh, Mr. Salis!" faltered the lady.

"And I really was ashamed of my surplice on Sunday. Mary here patched and darned all she could; but I looked a sad tatterdemalion. Didn't you think so?"

"I? Oh, no, Mr. Salis; I was thinking of your discourse."

"But I didn't wear it during the discourse," said Salis slowly.

"Oh, of course. I should not have noticed

it during the prayers," said Mrs. Berens, who was strung up now.

"That means that the prayers are better worth listening to than my sermons?" said Salis quickly.

"I did not say so," retorted Mrs. Berens, who momentarily grew more dignified and distant of manner, while Mary looked from one to the other, surprised into enjoyment of the novel scene.

"Ah, well, never mind," said Salis half-bitterly. "Never mind the sermon, Mrs. Berens."

"Is not that rather bad advice for one's pastor to give to a member of his flock, Mr. Salis?"

"I'm afraid it is," said Salis, laughing. "I am beaten. Now it's my turn, madam," he added to himself. "What do you think of that, Mrs. Berens?" and he held out and displayed the surplice, as a *modiste* would a dress.

"It looks very white, Mr. Salis," said the lady, fanning herself with a highly-scented handkerchief.

"Are you a judge of the quality of linen, Mrs. Berens?"

"Well, not a judge; but I think I can tell that this is very fine."

"Exactly," said Salis; "very fine, ma'am. Do you know what this is?"

"What it is—ahem! I suppose it is a surplice."

"Yes, ma'am, but it is something more," said Salis sharply; "it is an insult!"

"An insult, Mr. Salis?"

"Yes, ma'am, an insult; an anonymous insult! Somebody had said to himself or herself, 'This poor curate has lost his surplice, and can't afford another without going into debt; I'll buy him one and send him—carriage paid.'"

"Mr. Salis!"

"Yes, ma'am. That is the state of the case. All right, Mary, my dear; I know what I am saying. Perhaps Mrs. Berens may know who sent it."

"Mr. Salis! I——"

"Stop, stop, ma'am; pray don't tell me. I would rather not know; it would be too

painful to me. I only wish you, if you happen to know, to tell the anonymous donor what I feel about the matter. I was going to send the robe back to the maker; but, on second thoughts, I said to myself, I cannot afford a new one, so will swallow my pride, and wear it regularly, as a garb of penance, as a standing reproach——to the giver."

There was quite a strong odour of patchouli in the room, for Mrs. Berens was whisking her handkerchief about wildly.

"That's all I wanted to say, ma'am. Mary, you'll alter those buttons. I've tried it on, and my breast swelled so much with honest indignation, I suppose, that the fastenings nearly flew off. Good-bye, Mrs. Berens. Oh! pray shake hands, ma'am. We are not going to be bad friends because I spoke out honestly and plainly."

"Oh, no! Mr. Salis," faltered the lady, who had hard work to keep back her tears.

"I only want the donor to know how I feel about an anonymous gift, which stings a poor man who has any pride in him."

"But clergymen should not have any pride," said Mary, coming to Mrs. Berens' help.

"Quite right, my dear, but they have, and a great deal too sometimes."

He nodded shortly to both in turn, and stalked out of the room.

Mrs. Berens had risen. So had the tears, in spite of a very gallant fight. She made one more effort to keep them back, but her emotion was too strong; and, woman-like, seeking sympathy of woman, she sank upon her knees by Mary's side, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Good-bye, Mary, dear," she said at last. "I'm a weak, simple woman; but I can feel, and very deeply too."

This, after a long weeping communion, during which Mary Salis understood the gentle-hearted widow better than she had ever grasped her character before.

There was a very tender embrace, and then, with her veil drawn down tightly, Mrs. Berens left.

"Why not?" said Mary to herself as she

lay back thinking. "She is very good and amiable, and she loves him very much. And if I die—poor Hartley will seem to be alone.—Why not?"

Then her mind reverted to her visitor's words, and a cloud of trouble sat upon her brow.

"What can it mean?" she mused. "And I so helpless here!" she sighed at last; "compelled to hear everything from others, unable to do anything but lie here and think."

CHAPTER III.

MOREDOCK WRITES A NOTE.

"He's took to it—he's took to it!" muttered Moredock, as he scratched one side of his nose with the waxy end of his pipe.

"Ah, it's wonderful what a many doctors do take to it, and gallop theirselves off with it. Begins with a drop to keep 'em up sometimes, I s'pose, and then takes a little more and a little more."

The old man sat smoking and musing over a visit he had just had from North.

"I don't like it," he said to himself. "He mayn't be quite right some day when I call him in, and then it may be serious for me; I don't like it at all.

"It's no wonder when a man's got all

sorts o' things as he can mix up into cordles, if he feels a bit down. That was prime stuff as he give me in the morslem. Hah! that was stuff. Then that other as went down into your fingers and toes, as it did right to the very nails. Why, I shouldn't ha' been surprised if he'd brought Squire Luke back to life with it.

"Hi, hi, hi!" he chuckled; "never mind about Squire Luke; but I should like him by-and-by—by-and-by, of course—to have a bottle on it mixed ready to give me, and bring me back. Phew! that's a nasty subject to think about."

He smoked rather hurriedly for some time, and there was a curious, haggard expression in his face; but it died out under the influence of his tobacco, and, after a time, he gave a low chuckle and shook all over.

"'Old Buck!' that's what he said. 'Old Buck,' and give me a slap i' the chest, as nearly knocked all the wind out o' me. Not a bit like him to do. Not professional. As soon have expected Parson Salis to call me Old Cock. Ah, well! doctor's only a man

after all, and no book-larning won't make him anything else; but I don't like a doctor as takes to his drops.

"'Tarn't brandy, or gin, or rum, or whisky, or I should have smelt him, and he spoke straight enough d'rectly after. He takes some stuff as he mixes up, and it makes him ready to burst out rollicking like at times; but he recollects hisself quickly ag'in, and seems sorry.

"Ay, but he looks bad, that he do. Looks like a man who can't sleep — white and wanly. Well, as long as he tends me right, it don't matter. He paid up handsome for all I did for him. Hi! hi! hi! It was a rum game. How's young squire now, I wonder, and how's matters going on there? Ha! now that's curus. So sure as I begins thinking about my Dally, she comes. Hallo, my little princess, how do?"

"Oh, I am quite well, gran'fa," said Dally, entering the cottage, looking rather flushed and heated. "I'm in a great hurry, but I thought I'd just run down and see how you were."

"He come with you?" said the old man, pointing over the little maid's shoulder.

She looked sharply round, caught sight of Joe Chegg, and ran back and slammed the door.

"An idiot!" she cried sharply. "He's always following me about."

"Going to let him marry you, Dally?"

"I should think not, indeed! What nonsense, gran'fa."

"Well, what have you come for, eh? How's squire?"

"Getting nearly well again."

"Is he? How do you know? Were you going up to Hall night afore last?"

"N——"

"Yes, you were, Dally," said the old man, with a chuckle. "You needn't tell a lie. I know. I often see you when you don't know. You was going up to Hall."

"Well, then, I was," said Dally defiantly, "and I don't care who knows."

"'Cept Miss Leo, eh?"

The old man chuckled hugely, and rubbed his hands.

"I don't mind Miss Leo knowing. She does know," cried Dally. "Perhaps she sent me."

"Did she, though—did she, though? Ay, but she'll win him after all, Dally. She's better and handsomer than you are, and she's a leddy, Dally. You've got no chance against she."

"Haven't I, gran'fa? You'll see. But not if I'm obliged to go up to the Hall looking shabby and mean. You said I should have a silk gown and a feather."

"Did I? Did I? Oh, it was only my joking, Dally. You're such a pretty gel, you don't want silk dresses and feathers."

"No, I don't want 'em," said Dally sharply; "but men do. They like to see us dressed up. Squire Tom thinks I look a deal nicer when I've got my best frock on."

"Did he say so, Dally—did he say so?"

"Never you mind, gran'fa. Where's the money you promised me?"

"Nay, I've thought better of it. You shall have it some day—when I'm dead and gone."

"No, no, gran'fa, dear; I don't want you to die," whispered Dally, fondling him. "I want you to live a long time yet, and come and see me at the Hall."

"Tchah! you'll never get to be there. It'll be Miss Leo."

"Will it?" said Dally, with a toss of the head. "We shall see about that. You'll give me some money, won't you, gran'fa?"

"Nay. You've never made them new shirts yet."

"I've been so busy, gran'fa dear," cried the girl. "Why, I've been up to the Hall six times since I saw you last."

"Up to Hall? Not alone?"

"Yes, and alone. Why not?" said Dally saucily. "Besides, Miss Leo sent me."

"More than once?"

"Yes, gran'fa; often."

"Ay, that's it. I told you so. She's a leddy, and she'll win that game."

"Will she?" said Dally drily; "when she can't go up to see somebody, and sends me?"

The old man drew the corners of his

mouth a long way apart in a hideous grin, and then burst into a series of chuckles.

"Why, Dally, my gel; you are a wicked one, and no mistake."

"Oh, no, I'm not, gran'fa. I'm only fighting for myself; and you said you'd help me."

"And so I will, my pet; but I can't spare no money."

"Well, I don't know that I want it yet, gran'fa; but I want you to do something else."

"Ay, ay. What is it?" said the old man eagerly. "Not buy anything?"

"No, not buy anything," said Dally, diving her soft, round little arm down into her pocket, to reach which she had to raise one side of her dress. "I want you to write something, gran'fa."

"Nay, I never write now. Write it yourself. What you want me to write for, after all the schooling you've had?"

"Well, I have written something, gran'fa, but I want you to do it, too."

Dally had fished out a large, common-

looking Prayer Book, which opened easily in two places, from each of which she took an envelope, and laid upon the table. One was directed, and on being opened she took out a note. The other was blank, and with a folded sheet of paper therein.

Dally was quite at home in the sexton's cottage, and going to the mantelpiece she took down a corked penny ink-bottle, and a pen from out of a little common vase, while, from their special place, she took the old man's spectacles.

"Now, gran'fa," she said sharply, "I want you to write nicely, just what I've written there."

"What for? what for?" he cried, taking up the note after adjusting his glasses.

"To help me, gran'fa. You said you would."

"Yes, I said I would," he grumbled. "I said I would."

"And it won't cost nothing, gran'fa; not even a stamp," said the girl saucily.

"Hi — hi — hi! You're a wicked one, Dally, that you are," he chuckled, as he took

the pen, and after a good many preliminaries, settled himself down to write.

"Do the envelope first, gran'fa," whispered the girl excitedly.

"The envelope first, my pet. Ay, ay, ay."

He bent over the table, and then, very slowly and laboriously, copied the address in a singularly good hand for one so old.

"That's right," cried Dally, who was in a fever of impatience, but dared not show it. "Now the letter, gran'fa."

"Ay, ay, I'll do it," he said, chuckling as he mastered the contents. "Don't you hurry, my pet. I don't often use a pen now. But I used to at one time, and there wasn't many as——"

"Oh, do go on writing, gran'fa! Quick, quick! I want to get back."

"Ay, ay, I'll do it," said the old man; and he devoted himself assiduously to his task to the end.

"There!" he said; "will that help you, Dally?"

"Yes, gran'fa, dear," she cried. "But you won't tell."

"Tell?" he cried with a chuckle. "Nay, I never tell. I'm as close as the holes I dig, Dally. No one won't know from me."

As he chuckled and talked, the girl hastily tore up the first note, and refolded and enclosed the second. Moistening the envelope flap with her little red tongue, which looked quite pretty and flower-like, as it darted from her petally lips to the poisonous gum, with a sharp "good-bye!" she thrust the envelope into her book, and the book into her pocket, to hurry back to the Rectory, conscious that she was followed by Joe Chegg, and never once turning her head.

That night Salis sat by the shaded lamp, apparently reading, but a good deal troubled about North, respecting whom he had heard several disquieting rumours. Mary was busily working, and Leo finishing a letter to some relative in town.

"Add anything you like to that for Mary," she said, rising. "I'm very tired, and shall go to bed."

Salis frowned slightly, for it jarred upon

him that every now and then his sister should go off to her room just before he rang for the servants to come in to prayers.

He said nothing, however; the customary good-nights were said, and the curate and Mary were left alone.

Half-an-hour later, Dally and the homely cook were summoned, the lesson and prayers read, and after the closing of a door or two the Rectory became very still.

"I'll just look round, dear, and then carry you up; or shall I take you first?"

"No, Hartley, dear," said Mary; "go first. Perhaps I may have something to say."

"No fresh trouble, I hope," thought Salis, who remained ignorant that his sister intended a few words of reproach concerning Mrs. Berens, for as he stepped into the hall, and stooped to slip the bolt, something white, which seemed to have been slipped under the door, caught his eye.

"Circulars here in Duke's Hampton!" he said, picking up an envelope, and seeing that it was addressed to him.

"Here, Mary," he said, as he returned;

"some one wants us to lay in a stock of coals, and——"

He stopped short, and uttered quite a gasp.

"Hartley! Is anything wrong?"

He hesitated a moment, and then handed the letter to his sister.

It was very short—only a few lines:

"To Rev. H. Salis,

"I think you ought a know bout yure sister and her goins hon, ask her ware she is goin hout tow nite at 12 'clock wen ure abed.

"A Nonnymus."

Mary's countenance looked drawn and old as she let the note fall in her lap.

"For Heaven's sake don't look like that, Mary," cried Salis angrily. "I beg your pardon, dear. How absurd! An anonymous letter from some village busybody. It is not worth a second thought. There!"

He held the note to the candle, and re-

tained it as long as he could before tossing the fragment left burning into the grate.

"That's how the writer ought to be served," he cried. "Now, bed."

He carried Mary to her chamber, silencing her when she was about to speak; and then, after an affectionate "good-night," he sought his own room.

"It would be cowardly—cruel," he said, "to take notice of such a letter as that. I can't do it."

He threw himself into a chair, and sat till his candle went out, thinking deeply about his sister and her unfortunate connection with Candlish.

"No," he said, rising slowly; "I cannot act upon that note. It would be too paltry."

He stopped short, for just then the church clock rang out clearly the first stroke of midnight.

It was the hour named in the letter, and the thought came to him with a flash.

"No," he cried fiercely; "I cannot do

that;" but in spite of his words the spirit within warned him that he occupied the position of parent to his sister, and, quickly throwing open his door, he walked across to Leo's room and tapped sharply, and waited for a reply.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OPEN WINDOW.

As a rule, repeated knockings at a bedroom door when there is no response create alarm; thoughts of accident, illness, murder, teeming to the brain of the one who summons, and the alarm soon spreads through the house.

But in this case Hartley Salis took steps to prevent the alarm spreading, as he thought, in happy ignorance of the fact that Dally was down on her knees breathing hard with her ear to the keyhole.

He tapped softly, and uttered Leo's name again and again before trying the door and satisfying himself that it was locked on the inside.

He uttered a low, hissing sound as he

stood there thinking, his brow knit, and an angry glare in his eye. He felt no dread of an accident or of illness, for the note he had received was a warning of what he might expect. He only wanted one proof of its truth.

He went back to where Mary was waiting, full of anxiety.

"I know nothing yet," he said abruptly. "Wait!"

With his countenance growing more stern-looking and old, Salis went downstairs and into the drawing-room, which was the easiest way out on to the little lawn at the back.

The window fastening was removed without sound, the door opened, and he stepped out on to the short grass, with the stars overhead glimmering brightly enough for him to make out the dark patches of leafage trained against the house and the dim panes of the different casements.

He did not look in the direction of Dally Watlock's room, or he might have made out a fat little hand holding the blind sufficiently on one side for a pair of dark eyes to watch keenly what was going on. He stepped

straight at once for the summer-house, with his heart beating in a low, heavy throb, as he mentally prayed that the words written in that note might be a cruel lie.

Only a few moments, and then, feeling as if stricken by some mental blow—angry, jealous of the man who had stolen from him the love of his sister; enraged against the carefully-bred girl, whose life had been passed in the pure atmosphere of a country rectory, and to whose welfare he had devoted himself, to the exclusion of what might be dear to the heart of man. All contended in his heart for mastery, and seemed to suffocate him, as he dimly saw that it was true, and that the girl of refinement, to whom he and Mary had rendered up everything that her life might be smooth and pleasant, was behaving like some miserable drab who had the excuse of knowing no better, of looking at reputation as an intangible something, worthless for such as she.

The casement was wide open, pressing back the creepers; and the interior of Leo's room showed like a black, oblong patch.

"She may have gone to bed, and left the window open," Hartley whispered.

He shook his head, and a terrible sensation of despair beat down upon him.

"Poor Horace!" he muttered. "He must know more than I give him credit for. This explains his absence, and the strangeness of his ways."

He walked back into the drawing-room, and, without closing the window, went up to where Mary sat, waiting in an agony of suspense.

"Oh, Hartley!" she said, as she saw the look of agony in his eyes.

"It would be cruel to keep anything from you, Mary, in your helpless state."

"Yes, dear; pray—pray, speak!"

"It is quite true," he said laconically.

Mary's breath, as she drew it hard, sounded like the inspiring of one in agony; and she clasped her brother's hands tightly in hers.

"This can't be the first time by many," said Salis wearily. "Mary, dear, I've tried to do all that a brother could for you both,

and I've been too weak and indulgent, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Hartley, don't talk like that!" cried Mary, with a sob. "My own dear, noble, self-denying brother."

"Hush, hush! Mary!" he said sadly; "it has all been wrong, and here is the result!"

"What are you going to do, dear?"

"I know what I should like to do," he said hoarsely; "go and half kill that scoundrel at the Hall."

"Oh, Hartley!"

"This explains why North has not been. He knows too much. Heaven! how is it that a woman can be lost to all that is due to herself, leave alone to those she is supposed to love!"

There was an inexpressible bitterness in his tone as he spoke.

"But what are you going to do?"

"Do!" he said fiercely, but with a tinge of despair in his words; "I'm going to thank Heaven that the man whom I believe to be the soul of honour and manliness has been

saved from linking his fate with that of such a woman as Leo Salis."

"Oh, Hartley!" cried Mary, "she is our sister."

"Yes," he said bitterly; "she is our sister. I shall not forget that."

"But what are you going to do, dear?"

"What am I going to do?" said Salis, bending down and kissing Mary; "send you to bed to rest and be ready to bear the troubles of another day."

"But Leo?"

"I am going down to wait till she comes."

"And then?"

"And then? Ah, what then? What can I do, Mary?" he said despairingly. "You know Leo as well as I do. To speak to her would be waste of breath. There is only one thing I can do."

"Yes, dear," said Mary piteously.

"Strive hard to preserve your dignity and honour, and mine, in the eyes of the world."

"But that letter, Hartley!"

"Yes," he said bitterly; "it is too late for that. Well, I must strive. Good heavens! she is only fit to be treated like a wilful child."

"Oh, Hartley!"

"There, hush! little one," he said tenderly; "we must bear it patiently."

"You will wait up till she returns?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you will not be violent?"

"Violent! *Cui bono?* No, Mary; I shall say very little; but she will have to go from here."

There was a desolate sound in his voice—a look of misery in his eyes, which brought a sigh from Mary.

"Perhaps I ought to go raging up to the Hall, and try and find Tom Candlish," said the curate; "but I don't wish to repeat my last encounter with the scoundrel. It might be worse. There, you are suffering. Go to bed."

"But I could not sleep!"

"Never mind—lie down. There, I shall say very little to Leo. What I do say to

the point shall be in your presence, dear. Good night."

"Good night," he repeated, as he walked softly downstairs, and out through the drawing-room into the garden, to see that Leo's window remained open, when he sighed deeply, went back, and sat down to watch for his sister's return.

CHAPTER V.

A WAYWARD SISTER.

Hartley Salis was not the only watcher. Mary lay with her eyes burning and brain throbbing with contending emotions. She was in agony, for she had to combat, in addition to the horror of the discovery that her sister could be so shameless in her acts, a sensation of gratification that would force itself to the front.

It was terrible, but it was true; and she knew that she could not help a feeling of exultation that Horace North had discovered something of her sister's character before it was too late. She felt ashamed of this feeling, but it was utterly unselfish, and born of the love she felt for North. He

could never be more than a friend to her, but she would like to see him happy, and that he could never be with Leo for his wife.

She wept bitterly as she lay helplessly there, for it seemed like rejoicing that her sister was found out; but the thoughts would come, and they mastered her.

And there to share the watch of Hartley Salis was Dally Watlock, as she sat behind her curtained window with the casement just ajar. She could see nothing below, but she made sure that "Master" would not go to bed till "Miss Leo" returned.

"Bless her!" she said, with a little laugh that was like a baby born of old Moredock's chuckle. "How she will catch it! Serve her right: trying to come between us. But she may try after this. She'll get out to see him no more, and he'll soon forget her."

All was very still without, and Dally strained her ears to catch a sound, her eyes to make out some dark figure pacing the garden.

"I wonder where he is?" she said to her-

self. "He'd wait for her if it was for a month, and then my fine lady will catch it nicely.

"I wish I knew where he was," she muttered, and her wish was gratified, for all at once, as she was pressing the casement open another quarter of an inch, there was a low cough from down to her left, as Salis altered his position in his chair.

"He's watching just inside the drawing-room window," Dally said to herself, as she clasped her little hands together; "and when my lady comes home——"

Dally paused.

"My lady! No, she shan't never be my lady," she hissed fiercely. "I'd kill her, and gran'fa should bury her first."

"When she comes home," continued Dally with another malicious little laugh, "she'll wish she had never gone. I'll hear some of the row if I have to leave.

"Ah! It'll pay me for her getting a few kisses, and having his arm round her waist a bit. Ugh! how I hate the nasty, good-looking minx. I wish she was dead!"

Dally's teeth gritted together in the darkness, and she uttered a low, hissing noise, as she writhed in her jealousy, and pictured to herself the scene that was probably going on at the Hall.

"I don't care," she muttered recklessly. "What are a few kisses? I shan't miss 'em, and he's obliged to keep it up for a bit before he quite breaks it off. Says it will kill her when he does. I hope it will.

"Wonder how long she'll be?" continued Dally. "I don't mind. I can easily get a nap to-morrow after dinner, but I don't think she'll care to go to sleep after master's had his say."

She settled herself in her place to watch if it were till doomsday, so determined did she seem; and meanwhile Hartley sat just inside the drawing-room, shrouded in complete darkness which accorded well with the blackness of spirit which was upon him.

Leo could not reach her window without passing close to him, and he thought bitterly now of his simplicity in not grasp-

ing the meaning of torn-down growth and broken trellis by the summer-house. It was all plain enough now.

Thought succeeded thought. He could grasp clearly enough the meaning of North's actions when he had attended Tom Candlish—how bitter he had seemed against him, and then the full light came.

"Why, it must have been North who had surprised Tom Candlish, and beaten him within an inch of his life, and, oh! shame—the woman must have been Leo!

"And every one must have known this but poor, weak, blind mole, Hartley Salis," he groaned.

"Scoundrel! Base hound! Why, if I had been North I—but I'm forgetting myself," he said, as he pressed his hands to his throbbing brows, and felt that the veins in his temples were full and turgid.

"Not a word to me! Well, how could he speak, and complain to me? Oh, shame, shame, shame!"

The hot tears of indignation started to his eyes; the first that had been there for

many years, and they seemed to scald him till he dashed them fiercely away.

"I stand to her in the place of father," he muttered sternly; "and I'll do my duty by her, even if I have to keep her under lock and key."

The time did not seem long, though he sat there for hours, so active was his brain, and so flooded with memories of Leo's early life—her wilful disobedience, her determined opposition even in childish things, and Salis felt that the woman was the same in spirit as the child had been, and that if Leo was to be reclaimed he must pursue a very different course in the future.

All at once he started, for there was the faint chirp of a bird; then the loud *chink! chink!* of a blackbird, and he became on the alert, for it was the note uttered when the bird was alarmed.

Day was close at hand, for there was a faint line of light in the east, and sure enough directly after there was a faint, rustling sound, as of a dress brushing against some bush; directly after—*ruff, ruff; ruff,*

ruff—the rustling of the dress as its wearer walked quickly up the green path, as if in fear of being overtaken by the coming day.

Then it seemed a little darker just in front of the drawing-room window; a shrub was blotted out by something black, which seemed to glide by—*ruff, ruff; ruff, ruff*—and then there was a hard breathing, and the creak of a piece of lattice.

For the moment, now that the time had arrived, Salis sat there quite overcome, and ready to let the opportunity pass.

But it was only momentary. Stung into action by the feeling that this woman was cruelly wronging and disgracing brother and sister, he rose from his place, took half-a-dozen quick strides, and was over the grass and at Leo's elbow as she clung to the side of the summer-house, and was about to raise herself higher.

The sound of his approach was covered by the noise Leo made in rustling the growth pressed against her breast, and the first hint she had of discovery was a strong,

firm hand grasping her delicate shoulder with almost painful violence.

She could not turn her head so as to confront Salis, for she was above the ground, clinging with outstretched arms to the strong trellis-work of the summer-house, but she uttered a low, hoarse cry, and a shiver ran through her as she felt the touch.

"Horace North!" she hissed, with her chin pressed down upon her breast. "You are a mean coward and spy. Oh, if I were a man!"

Salis could not speak for a moment or two as he heard this confirmation of his belief, but he tightened his grasp till Leo uttered a cry of pain.

"You coward!" she hissed again.

"It is not Horace North," said Salis, in a deep voice. "Thank Heaven he does not know of this."

"Hartley!"

"Yes, Hartley!"

"And North has told you?"

"Nothing!"

He half dragged her down, and kept his grasp upon her shoulder till she was inside

the drawing-room and he had closed the window.

"You can go up to your bedroom by the stairs," he said sternly, "without stealing in like a thief. Had some one told me of this to my face I should have said he lied."

"There, say what you have to say, and end this scene," cried Leo, defiantly now.

"I have nothing to say—now," said Salis sternly.

"Oh, say it! I am not a child."

"I am under a promise to Mary that I will say nothing now."

Salis knew that she turned upon him very sharply, but he could not see her face.

"Under a promise to Mary? There, if anything is to be said, say it."

Salis drew in his breath sharply, and the words came rushing to his lips, but he mastered the passion within him, and walked to the door to open it.

A dim twilight now faintly filled the hall, showing the curate's figure framed in the doorway. Then he stood aside, holding the way open.

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"Go!" he said.

"Sent to bed like a naughty child," she cried, in a harsh, mocking voice, which feebly hid the anger and defiance by which she was nerved.

Salis made no reply, nor did he speak again for some moments.

"Go to your room," he said again, more sternly.

Leo made an angry gesture as if she would resist. Then, giving a childish, petulant stamp upon the floor, she walked quickly by him and ascended the stairs, Salis following closely behind.

As they reached the landing, it was to find Mary's door open, and that the half-helpless invalid had dragged herself there, to stand clinging to the side.

"Leo—Hartley," she said, in a low, pained voice: "come here."

"I am sent to bed," said Leo mockingly; and she was passing on, but Salis caught her by the arm and checked her. Then he led her to the far end of the room before returning to close the door and help Mary to her couch.

"I can speak now," he said, in a low voice full of passion, but at the same time well under control. "Where have you been?"

"Hartley!" said Mary appealingly.

"Hush, my child," he replied. "I know what I am saying. I wish to avoid the scandal of this being known to the servants, but your position and mine demand an explanation. Leo Salis, where have you been?"

She turned her handsome, defiant face towards where he stood, and now it was beginning to be visible in the soft dawn, pale, fierce, and implacable as that of one who has recklessly set every law at defiance and is ready to dare all.

"Where have I been?" she said. "Out!"

"I insist upon a proper reply to my question. I say, where have you been?"

"There!" she cried; "there is no need to fence. You know where I have been?"

"To meet that man Candlish, after promising me that your intercourse with him should be at an end; and, to make things worse, you

have stolen from the house in this disgraceful, clandestine way."

"Is there any need for this?" said Leo sharply. "There, if you wish to know, I have been to Candlish Hall. Sir Thomas is forbidden this house, so you force me to go to him. You knew where I had been."

"Yes, I knew where you had been," assented Salis, as Mary looked from one to the other, not knowing what to say.

"Now, answer me a question," cried Leo fiercely. "Was it Horace North, in his mean, contemptible, jealous spite, who set you to watch me?"

"Leo!" cried Mary, stung to words by her sister's accusation.

"Silence! What is it to you, you miserable worm?" cried Leo furiously. "My home has been made a purgatory for months past by you and dear Hartley here. Plotting together both of you to make me miserable, to treat me as a little girl, and to check me at every turn. What Hartley did not try, you thought, and suggested to him till my very soul recoiled against you both

and your miserable tyranny. I say it was North—the mean wretch—who set you to watch me."

"Horace North is too true a man to give you a second thought; too stern and upright to speak of you after your cruel treachery to him."

"It is not true. I was neither cruel nor treacherous to him," cried Leo.

"He told me nothing. Your acts are growing public, or I should not have known what I know now; and this must have an end."

"What end?" said Leo shrewishly. "Am I to be confined to my room? Bah! I have had enough of all this. Yes, I have been to see the man I love, and will go again and again."

"To your disgrace."

"To my disgrace, or to my death, if I like," cried Leo fiercely. "I'll have no more of this humdrum, miserable life, where I must neither move nor stir save as my brother and sister ordain."

"Have you thought what this means?" said Salis sternly.

"Thought? No. I have no time for thinking. I know."

The day was dawning fast, and the pale, soft light slanting into Mary's bedroom at the sides of the curtain, giving to each face a ghastly, livid look.

Salis strode to the window, and snatched the curtain aside before turning to pour out upon his sister's head the hot vial of his wrath. But as he turned and faced her his anger was swept away by a great flood of pity, and he approached her gently, for he read in the handsome face before him, flushed with defiant, reckless passion, that she had reached a point in her life when a word might turn her to a future of good or one of misery and despair. She gazed at him as if he were her greatest enemy, and then at Mary, to see her hands extended, and a look of tenderness and love in her pitying eyes.

But the time was unpropitious; there had been a scene with her lover an hour before, which had stirred her angry passions to their deepest depth, and then, as she en-

countered her brother with his stern words of reproach, it seemed to her that the time had come when she must strive for her freedom. Tom Candlish had reproached her for her cowardice, and laughed her obedience to those at home to scorn. He had brutally told her to go and trouble him no more with letter or message, for she was a poor puling thing, and she had returned heart-broken and in misery, for, defiant to all else, she was this man's slave.

The encounter then had unloosed her angry passions, and flogging herself again and again with her lover's words, she turned recklessly upon those who were ready to forgive and take her to their breasts.

"Leo, dear Leo, for pity's sake!" cried Mary wildly. "Come to me, sister. I cannot even crawl to you."

"And you ask me, worse than worm that you are, to go down on my knees to you; and for what, pray? For the heinous sin of being true to the man I love. There, do you hear me, to the man I love?"

"Leo! sister!" said Salis, trying to take her hand, but she struck his away with an angry gesture which he did not resent.

"Well, what have you to say?" she cried. "Do you want to preach to me, to ask me to repent and sorrow with you? For what? Is it a crime to love?"

"Leo, my child!"

"Leo, my child!" she cried scornfully, as she repeated his words. "I tell you I am a child no longer, and that I will think and act for myself. Fool, idiot that I have been!" she cried, as her passion grew more wild and her voice rose. "I have submitted to you both till it has become unbearable. From this day, if I stay here, I will be my own mistress, and suffer your dictation no more. Teach and torture Mary into her grave, if you like, but I will be free."

"Say nothing, Hartley," said Mary softly. "She will repent all this, dear, when she is calm. Leo, stay with me. Hartley, dear, pray say no more; she is not mistress of herself, and to-morrow, perhaps to-day, this

painful scene will be forgiven and forgotten by us all."

"Forgiven? No. Forgotten? Never," cried Leo; "and I tell you both that if I am driven from the home that I should have shared, and my future becomes to me a curse, it is your work."

She had lashed herself into a pitch of unreasoning fury, and invective was flowing fast from her lips, when, in the midst of one of her most furious bursts, and just as Salis was being driven to despair, there was a sharp tap at the door, and before it could be answered, another, and Dally came into the room.

"Is Miss Leo ill, sir?" she cried. "I heard her sobbing in my room. Can I do anything? Shall I light a fire?"

It was Dally's idea of being of some help, that of lighting a fire.

"No, no. Go away," cried Salis passionately; but he said no more, for Leo had crossed quickly to the little servant maid, and clung to her.

"Go with me to my room, Dally," she said in a sharp, strained voice; "and let them follow me if they dare."

"Oh, Leo, my child, for Heaven's sake!" cried Salis.

"For Heaven's sake!" she cried wildly, as she clung to Dally. "What have you to do with Heaven, who have made my life a curse? Take me, Dally, take me away, for I am almost blind."

"My poor, darling mistress!" sobbed the little traitress, passing her hand round Leo's waist, and helping her towards the door, Leo yielding to the girl's guidance, and keeping her defiant eyes flashing from sister to brother and back.

The door closed, and as Salis and Mary gazed after the retreating pair, a wild hysterical sob, followed by a passionate cry, reached their ears, and it was as if misery and despair were henceforth to be their lot; but at that moment, from the dewy meadow at the bottom of the garden, a lark rose to begin circling round and round, scattering his jubilant, silvery notes of song far and

wide on the morning air. And as it proclaimed, as it were, to every listening ear that a new day had begun, hope and light flashed into the hearts of those within the room.

"It will be a hard task, Mary," said Salis, going down on one knee beside Mary, who clung to him with a look of appeal that went to his heart. "Yes, a hard task, dear," he said again, as he kissed her. "There, you will not go to bed now, but lie back and have a few hours' sleep. The darkness of the night has passed, and hope cometh with the day."

"But Leo—Leo!" moaned Mary, and, unable to contain herself longer, she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Hush! darling. Come: I want my sister's help. There, fight it down. Hers were the words of a passionate, hysterical woman. She will be penitent when the fit is over. What now?"

"Miss Leo, sir—Miss Leo!" cried Dally, running into the room.

"Well, what, girl?" cried Salis, alarmed by the maid's frantic, excited look.

"She sent me out of the room, sir, to fetch her cloak."

"Hush! Come with me," said Salis, hastily rising to accompany Dally from the room, but Mary clung spasmodically to his hand.

"No, no; let her speak. I cannot bear the suspense."

Salis nodded his head sharply, and the girl went on:

"I went down, sir, and when I came back she was standing in the middle of the room with a glass on the table, and something spilled——"

Salis stopped to hear no more, but rushed into Leo's room to find her clinging to the foot of the bed, her eyes dilated, a look of horror in her face, and in the same glance he took in that which Dally had described—a glass upon the table, overturned, and some fluid staining the cover and slowly sinking down the side towards the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR IS ECCENTRIC.

"WANT me to attend Miss Leo Salis? Not I. Send to King's Hampton for old——"

"But, please, sir."

"Please, sir? Yes, you do please this sir. Why, you pretty little, apple-faced, sloe-eyed, cherry-cheeked piece of human fruit! Here, let's have a look at your little face!"

"Oh, Dr. North! For shame! You shouldn't."

There was the sound of a smart kiss, and then Horace North stood gazing wildly at Dally as she made believe to be very much hurt in her dignity.

"You shouldn't, sir, and Miss Leo all the time a-dying."

"Miss Leo—very ill?"

"Yes, sir; I told you so, and then you began talking nonsense and hauling me about. I feel quite ashamed."

"But I cannot go to her, girl. It is impossible," cried North excitedly.

"But master said I was to fetch you, sir. Oh, I wouldn't ha' thought it of you!"

"I beg your pardon, Dally, I was not thinking. I—I—when was she taken bad?"

"Sudden like—early this morning, sir. You will come, won't you? We're quite frightened."

"Yes, I'll come," said North quickly. "By what strange irony of fate am I called upon again to attend on her?" he thought to himself, as he recalled her last illness, and the way in which she had declared her passion for him.

"Idiot! fool!" he said. "What a mere child! And I a medical man, and let my weak vanity carry me away so that I could not see that all was delirium."

"Did you speak, sir?" said Dally, who

trotted beside him as he walked with rapid strides towards the Rectory.

"No. Yes. How was it all?"

"Well, sir, I hardly know; only that I left Miss Leo this morning for a minute, and when I came back she'd been drinking something out of a glass, and looked as if she'd poisoned herself."

"Absurd! But this morning? How came you to be with her this morning? Why, it is only five now."

"No, sir. We were up very early."

"Early? Why, you look as if you had not been to bed. Here, Dally, what has been going on at the Rectory?"

"Going on, sir? Oh, I couldn't tell you. And here's master, sir; ask him."

In fact, Salis had just run down from Leo's room to see if the doctor was coming, and, on catching sight of him, came to hurry him on.

"For Heaven's sake be quick!" he cried. "Leo is dying!"

North hurried in with him, and upstairs, to find Leo lying upon the bed where her

brother had placed her, pale, motionless, and with her eyes half closed.

"Don't ask questions, but act," panted Salis.

"I am acting," said North sternly, as he bent over his patient, and rapidly grasped the position. "Do you know what she has taken?"

"No."

"What poisons have you in the house?"

"None."

"Humph!" ejaculated the doctor, examining and smelling the glass. "She has got at something."

"But, for pity's sake, act—act," said Salis, in horror. "You are letting her sink before your eyes."

"Best thing too," said North, laughing. "A miserable little jilt! I——"

He paused in horror at the words which had fallen from his lips, and met his friend's wondering gaze. Then, as if mastering himself, he gave sundry orders in a quick, sharp way, and evidently bestirred himself to restore the patient.

For the moment Salis had felt disposed to bid him leave the house; but it was a case of emergency, and, keeping a watchful eye upon North, he helped where it was necessary, with the result that an hour later Mary was left seated beside her, Leo being utterly prostrate, and the doctor followed his friend down to the breakfast-room where the meal was spread.

"Hah!" cried North, "that's better. Breakfast's a glorious meal. Come, old chap, sit down. Never mind the jade; she's all right now."

"In Heaven's name, North, what does this mean?" cried Salis.

North burst into a hearty laugh, which his wild eyes seemed to contradict.

"Mean, eh?" he cried. "Why, I ought to ask you. What game has the lively little witch been up to now?"

"North!" cried Salis piteously.

"There, you needn't tell me," cried North, laughing. "Tom, eh? Ah, he's a sad dog!"

"North, for pity's sake, have some

decency. I suspected that you had found something out, and I can understand your throwing her over like this."

"Throw her over?" laughed North. "Why she threw me over for Tom. She's a queer one, old chap."

"Are you a man?" cried Salis fiercely, "that you torture me like this. Can you not see the shame of it—the disgrace to Mary and me? Horace North, I feel as if I were grovelling in the mire, and you, my oldest friend, come and set your heel upon my neck."

"Eh? Heel? Your neck?"

"Yes; I know that you must have suffered heavily. It has been a terrible affliction to both Mary and me, for we felt with you; but for Heaven's sake, Horace, don't rush into this reckless extreme. Man, man, I want your sympathy and help, if ever I did, and you—you are so changed."

"Yes, yes," said North, in a hoarse whisper, and with a ghastly look in his eyes. "So changed—so horribly changed."

"Ah!" cried Salis joyfully; "that's like

your old self again. Why, North, what has come to you?"

"Come to me? You dog! Come to me, eh? Look as if I'd been drinking, do I? Oh, I'm all right enough!"

Salis looked at him aghast once more, just as if he had been indeed drinking; but his friend's acts belied his words, for he uttered a low groan, laid his arms upon the table and let his head sink down.

There was such desolation in his manner that Salis crossed to him and laid his hand upon his shoulder, when, to his horror, the poor fellow uttered a wild shriek, and started up to dash to the other side of the room.

"Oh, it was you," said North huskily, as he gazed wildly at his friend, his piteous eyes seeming to ask what he thought of his acts.

"Why, North, old fellow, what is the matter? You can trust me."

"Matter?" cried North excitedly—"matter? No, no, nothing is the matter. A little out of order. Don't take any notice of what I say."

"But I must take notice. Do you suppose I can see my oldest and best friend go on in this mad way?"

"No, no; don't say that," cried North, catching him fiercely by the wrist; "not 'mad way.' A little eccentric: that's all. Don't take any notice."

"But——"

"No, no; don't take any notice. Yes, I was upset about her. It was a shock."

"I knew it was that," cried Salis; "but, North, my dear fellow, you must master it: we are old friends. I will keep nothing from you. Let us be mutually helpful. Is it nothing to us to have such a horror as this in our midst?"

"It is terrible for you," said North quietly. "The foolish girl!"

"Hah!" ejaculated Salis, beaming upon him; "that sounds like you."

"I bear her no malice," continued North dreamily. "It has all been one bitter mistake."

"Yes, a bitter, bitter mistake!" assented Salis.

"But it is over now. It was in her delirium that she told me she loved me."

"Leo told you this?"

"Yes. I ought to have known better. But I am only a weak man, Salis. It is over now."

"It is for the best, my dear old fellow," cried Salis warmly. "There, you are yourself again. Now tell me. What had she taken?"

"Some strong narcotic poison. I fancy it was belladonna. Did she use it for her eyes?"

"No. I think not. No," said Salis thoughtfully. "Nature had not made it necessary for her to try and improve her looks."

"No," said North thoughtfully. "Had you quarrelled?"

Salis stood with his brows knit for a few moments, and then he turned sharply upon North.

"Tell me first," he said, "you surprised my sister with that scoundrel, Candlish?"

North shuddered as he bowed his head.

"And I am right in thinking it was you who half killed him?"

"Yes," said North; "it was I."

"I don't wonder at it," said Salis quietly. "Now I'll answer your question. Mary and I hoped we had broken all that affair off between my sister and Candlish; but last night I made a discovery, and we did quarrel."

"And the weak, foolish girl flew to that narcotic poison to end her trouble," said North thoughtfully. "Ah, well, you must watch her now. There is no danger. It is past."

"Thanks to you!"

"Thanks to me? Perhaps so; but don't send for me again unless it is a case of emergency. There, I must go now."

He rose painfully, looking wild and haggard; but the next moment his whole appearance changed, and he gave his friend a tremendous back-handed blow in the chest.

"She'll be all right, old chap, and ready to carry on her games again directly. She's

a lively one, parson; as sprightly a filly as was ever foaled. And you, too—you sham old saint; I can see through you, and Madame Crippleoria upstairs! I——"

He smote himself heavily in the mouth, uttered a low groan, and with a despairing look in his eyes that seemed mingled of horror and fright, he glanced wildly at Salis, and hurried from the place.

CHAPTER VII.

HAUNTED.

"Leo, how could you do so foolish a thing?" said Mary Salis, a few days later, as she sat by her sister's couch.

"What do you mean?" said Leo feebly.

"You know what I mean, dear. Is life so valueless that in a rash moment you would have cast it away?"

"Do you suppose, then, that I tried to take my life?" cried Leo, in a low, weak voice.

"Don't let's talk about it," said Mary, with a shudder; "unless it is in sorrow."

"Why was it placed there?" said Leo, catching her sister's wrist.

"Placed there?"

"Yes. Was it Hartley's doing?"

"Hartley's doing?"

"Yes; the glass standing on my table as if it held water. Did Hartley do it, Mary?"

"Is your mind wandering, dear?" said Mary, laying her cool hand upon her sister's white forehead.

"No; I'm as calm as you are. Hartley must have placed it ready for me—to get rid of his wicked sister, I suppose."

"Leo! Don't speak like that. How can you, dear? Hartley place a glass for you!"

"Yes. I thought it was water, and I drank it."

"Hush, Leo, dear!"

"You don't believe me! Very well; I cannot help it. The stuff was placed ready for me on the table, and I drank it."

Mary sighed, but she kept her cool, soft hand pressed upon her sister's brow.

"Why do you stop here?" said Leo, at last.

"Because I wish to talk to you—to try and be of some help."

There was a silence which lasted some minutes, and then Leo turned her fierce dark eyes sharply on her sister.

"You have kept back his letters," she said sternly.

"His letters!"

"Yes; he has written to me since I have been ill."

Mary shook her head, and Leo gazed full in her eyes to satisfy herself that this was the truth.

"Has he sent to ask how I am?"

"No."

Leo closed her eyes, and lay back with her lips moving slightly, while Mary watched and wondered whether North would come and see her sister again, and whether any fresh eccentricity had been noticed.

Had she known all she would have been less calm.

That morning Cousin Thompson had come down, gone straight to the Manor, and saluted Mrs. Milt.

"Doctor in his room?"

"No, sir; master's ill."

"Not seriously?" said Cousin Thompson, with thoughts of being next of kin.

"I don't know, sir," said the housekeeper. "Master certainly don't seem as I should like to see him."

"Dear me!" said Cousin Thompson thoughtfully. "That's bad, Mrs. Milt; that's bad. However, I'll go up and see him."

The housekeeper shook her head.

"What do you mean, Mrs. Milt?"

"I mean that I don't think he'll see you, sir."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense! Go and tell him I'm here."

The housekeeper went away, and came back in five minutes, looking troubled.

"Master says you must excuse him, sir. That you are to please ask for what you want, but he is too unwell to see you."

"Dear me, Mrs. Milt; I'm sorry to hear this," said the solicitor, with a look of commiseration. "But, then, he is a doctor, and must know his symptoms. Has he had any one to see him?"

"No, sir."

"Then he is not very bad. I mean no doctor?"

"No, sir; no doctor."

"I didn't mean solicitor, Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson, laughing unpleasantly. "Of course, if he required a solicitor he would send for me, eh?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"He has not sent for a solicitor, of course —to make his will, eh?" jocularly. "No, no; of course not."

"Perhaps you had better ask master about such things as that, sir," said Mrs. Milt, with asperity. "I know nothing about that."

"You do, you hag!" said Cousin Thompson to himself: "you do, or you wouldn't be so eager to disclaim all knowledge of such an act—and deed. This must be seen to, for I can't afford to have you coming between me and my rights, madam. This must be seen to."

"What would you like to take, sir?"

"Anything, my dear Mrs. Milt, anything. Too busy a man to trouble about food. I'm

going to see a client, and while I'm gone perhaps you will get a snack ready for me."

"You will not sleep here, I suppose?"

"But I will sleep here, Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson, smiling. "I do not feel as if I could go back to town without being able to take with me the knowledge that my cousin is in better health."

"And not at the mercy of thieves and scheming people," he muttered, as he went off to see Mrs. Berens, as he put it, "*re* shares."

North's bedroom bell rang violently as Cousin Thompson disappeared down the road, and Mrs. Milt went up to the door and knocked.

"Has that man gone?" came from within.

"Yes, sir."

"Bring up the brandy."

Mrs. Milt uttered a sigh.

"May I bring you up a little broth, sir, too?" she whispered, with her face close to the panel. "You've had nothing to-day, sir, and you must be growing faint."

"Bring up the brandy!" roared North fiercely. "Do you hear?"

"And him to speak to me like that!" sighed the housekeeper, as she went down for the spirit decanter; "and for him, too, who never took anything but tea for days together, to be asking for brandy in this reckless way. Five times have I filled up the spirit decanter this week."

She returned with the brandy and knocked.

No answer.

"I've brought the brandy, sir."

"Set it down."

"Can I speak to you, sir?"

There was a fierce stamp of the foot which made the jug rattle in the basin on the washstand, and Mrs. Milt set down the decanter close to the door, and went down again, raising her apron to her eyes.

"I wouldn't have any one know how bad he is for the world," she sighed; and, resisting the temptation to stand and watch the opening of the door, the old lady went into her own room and shut herself in.

As the sound of the closing door rose to the upstair rooms, that of North's chamber was cautiously opened and a hand was thrust out to go on feeling about till it came in contact with the decanter, which it seized and bore in, the door being reclosed as the hand and arm disappeared.

The room within was darkened, and the figure of Horace North looked shadowy and strange as he walked hastily to and fro, now here, now there, as some wild animal restlessly parades the sides of his cage.

He held the decanter in his hand, and seemed in no hurry to use the spirit; but at last he set it down upon the dressing-table, drew the curtain a little on one side, and went to the washstand, from which he brought the water-bottle and tumbler.

As he poured out some of the spirit into a glass, the light shone full upon his face, and he blinked as if his eyes were dazzled by the glare.

The decanter made a chattering noise against the glass till he rested his trembling

hand upon the side, ceased pouring, and closed his eyes for a few moments to rest.

As he opened them again his gaze fell upon his reflection in the dressing-glass upon the table, and he stood fixed to the spot, glaring at the wild-looking object before him, with its sunken eyes, wrinkled brow, and horrified, hunted, and frightened look.

He had seen such a face as that hundreds of times in the case of patients suffering from some form of mania, generally in connection with drink, and it petrified him for the time, for his brain refused to accept the fact that he was gazing at his own reflection.

It was a strange scene in that darkened room, with the one broad band of light shining in through the half-drawn curtain, falling upon that haggard and ghastly face gazing at its counterpart, each displaying a haunted look of horror—a dread so terrible that it explained North's next action, which was to let fall decanter and glass with a crash upon the floor, before slowly backing away right to the furthest portion of the room,

where he stood against the wall, panting heavily.

The curtain fell back, as if an invisible hand had held it for a time, and once more the room was in semi-gloom, while the faint, sick odour of the brandy gradually diffused itself through the place till it reached the trembling man's nostrils and made him shudder.

"Like the smell of that place—like the smell of that place! Is this to go on for ever?"

Again he determinedly argued the question, and felt that, failing to arrest the decay of Luke Candlish, he had imbibed the essence of the man which, needing a fleshy body in which to live, had possessed him, so that his fate seemed to be that he must evermore lead a double life, in which there was one soul under the control of his well-schooled brain; the other wild, independent, and for whose words and actions he must respond.

"I cannot bear it," he muttered, as he stood back against the wall, as far from the

faint light as the room would allow. "It must be like madness in others' eyes, and yet I am sane. I feel like a man haunted by a shadow, and yet it is a fancy—a terrible waking dream. But I will—Heaven help me!—I will look at it from a scientific point of view; say it is so—that I have arrested spirit and not body. Well, what then? Is there anything to fear?

"No; and I will not fear it," he muttered, "any more than I would the dead; but," he added, after a pause, "it is the living I fear. I cannot explain — I cannot control — this horror—bah! this essence—when it speaks, and the living give me the blame. No, I cannot, I dare not, explain. Who would believe? No one. They would say I was mad."

A gentle tap at the door, but no response. A louder tapping, and no answer.

"Mr. Thompson, sir, says he must see you on very particular business."

North heard the words. His crafty, keen-eyed cousin was there. How could he see him now? It was impossible. He had declined before, and he was persisting again.

"Will you come down and see him, sir?"

"No: don't do that, Horace, if you are ill. Open the door and I'll come and chat to you there."

No sound in reply; but directly after there was a loud noise of mocking laughter from within the room, a boisterous shout, and a partly-heard speech.

"Oh, my dear master!" cried Mrs. Milt.

"Ah!" ejaculated Cousin Thompson, across whose imagination glided the fair prospect of the beautiful Manor House estate, and his eyes glistened as he said softly, "I'm afraid he is very ill."

CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN THOMPSON'S DUTY.

"Oh, no; it's nothing at all, sir—nothing at all," said Mrs. Milt hastily; "and I didn't know you'd come upstairs behind me, sir."

"It was to save you a journey, my dear Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson smoothly. "Yes, I'm afraid he is very ill. A little delirious, I think."

"Delirious, sir? Oh, nonsense! Master's often like that."

"Indeed!" said Cousin Thompson, in a tone of voice which made the housekeeper wish she had bitten off her tongue before she had committed herself to such a speech. "You heard him utter that laugh?"

"Well, surely to goodness, sir, that don't

signify anything. A laugh! I wish I could laugh."

"But he gave a 'view halloo!' and said something about a fox."

"Well, really, sir, what if he did? There's nothing master likes better after a hard week's work and a lot of anxiety than a gallop after the hounds. It does him good. Why, a doctor wants taking out of himself sometimes, specially one who works as hard as master does. A medical man's anxiety sometimes is enough to drive him mad."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Cousin Thompson smoothly. "Hadn't you better knock again?"

"No, sir, I hadn't," said Mrs. Milt tartly. "I'm quite sure master don't want to be disturbed."

"But really, my good woman, it seems to me that he ought to have medical advice."

"And it seems to me, sir, as he oughtn't to. If master's not well and can't do himself good, nobody else can, I'm sure; and if you please, sir, will you come downstairs? He'd be very angry if we stopped here."

"Oh, certainly, Mrs. Milt. Pray forgive me. I could not help feeling a little bit anxious about my cousin."

"I haven't got nothing to forgive, sir," said the old lady; "only I'd have you know that I'm as anxious about my dear master as anybody."

"Of course, Mrs. Milt. Quite natural. Dr. North is a remarkable man, and will some day become very famous."

"I dessay, sir," said Mrs. Milt drily. "I think you said you should stop all night?"

"Yes, Mrs. Milt; and I'm afraid my business here will keep me another day, if it is not troubling you too much."

"Oh, that don't matter at all, sir. I'm sure master wishes you to be made very comfortable, and as far as in me lies, sir, I shall carry out his wishes."

"Thank you, Mrs. Milt. I'm sure you will," said Cousin Thompson; and Mrs. Milt rustled out of the room, looking very hard and determined, but as soon as she was out of sight deep lines of anxiety began to

appear about her eyes, and she wrung her hands.

"Yes," said Cousin Thompson, going at once to North's table and sitting down to write a letter; "I shall sleep here to-night, Mrs. Milt, and I shall sleep here to-morrow night, and perhaps a great many other nights. It is no use to be a legal adviser unless I legally look after my sick cousin's affairs."

Cousin Thompson's anxiety about his cousin gave his countenance a very happy and contented look.

"Things are looking up," he said, as he finished and fastened his letter. "Everything comes to the man who waits. Even pleasant-looking, plump Mrs. Berens may—who knows?"

He carefully tore off a stamp from a sheet in the writing-table drawer, moistened it upon a very large, unpleasant-looking tongue, and affixed it to the envelope.

"Perhaps she is right, and he will be better without medical advice," he said, with a pleasant smile upon his countenance.

"Why should I interfere? That is where some people make such a mistake: they will dig up a plant to look at its roots. I prefer letting a well-growing plant alone. Yes, things are looking up. Now for my genial baronet."

He walked out into the hall, and took his hat, just as there was a ring at the gate bell.

"Who's this?" he said; and he walked into the dining-room and nearly closed the door, but not quite.

The next minute there were steps in the hall, the door was opened, and the curate's bluff voice rang through the place in an inquiry after the doctor.

"He's very poorly, sir," said Mrs. Milt, in a low and cautious voice. "I don't really know what to make of him."

"I do," said Salis. "He wants rest and change, Mrs. Milt."

"Yes, sir; I think that's it, sir."

"I wish I could get him away. I will."

"Will you?" said Cousin Thompson softly.

"Here, I'll go up and see him. In his room, I suppose?"

"Excuse me, sir; I think you had better not. It irritates him. Old Moredock came last night about some trifling ailment, and poor master was quite angry about it. Then Mr. Thompson went up to his door, and it seemed to irritate him. You know how tetchy and fretful it makes any one when he's ill."

"I want to see him, Mrs. Milt. I want to talk to him."

Cousin Thompson's eyes twitched.

"But I'll go by your advice."

Mrs. Milt said something in reply which the listener missed, and consequently exaggerated largely as to its value, and directly after Salis went away in a new character—to wit, that of Cousin Thompson's mortal enemy; though Salis himself was in utter ignorance of the fact.

"Well, and how are we to-day?" said the lawyer on entering the old library at the Hall.

Sir Thomas Candlish was lying back in his chair, with a cigar in his mouth, a sporting paper on his lap, and a soda and brandy—or, rather, two brandies and a soda —at his elbow.

"How are we to-day!" he snarled. "Don't come here talking like a cursed smooth humbug of a doctor about to feel one's pulse."

"But I am a doctor, and I have come to feel your pulse, my dear sir," said Cousin Thompson laughingly.

"Eh?—what? Again! Why, there's nothing due yet."

"There, there, there! don't trouble yourself, my dear Sir Thomas. There is a little amount to meet; but you are not, as you used to be, worried about money matters. You can pay."

"Yes," snarled Tom Candlish; "and you seem to know it, too."

"Come, that's unkind. It isn't generous, my dear sir. Surely if a man lends money he has a right to claim repayment."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that—the old,

old jargon of the craft. I don't want to borrow now. If I did I suppose I should hear all about your friend in the City, eh ?—your client who advances the money, eh ?"

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" laughed Thompson. "One needn't ask how you are. The old vein of fun is coming back flushed with health and strength."

"Cursed slowly. Now, then, what do you want ?"

"Oh, it is a mere trifling business."

"A trifle."

"It would have been serious to you once ; but it is a trifle now."

"Well, let's have it."

"No, no, not yet. There, I'll take a cigar and a B. and S."

"Ah, do," said Candlish sarcastically. "Make yourself at home, pray."

"To be sure I will. I've come to doctor you and do you good."

"D—n all doctors !" sneered Candlish.

"Amen," said Cousin Thompson merrily, as he took a cigar, lit it, and helped himself to the brandy. "Look here, sir ; you

sit alone and mope too much. You want exercise."

"How the devil am I to take exercise, when, as soon as I get on a horse, my head begins to swim?"

"And a pretty girl or two to see you."

Tom Candlish uttered a low, blackguardly, self-satisfied chuckle.

"Eh? I say. Hallo!" cried Cousin Thompson. "Oh, I see. Well, mum's the word. But, come; you do want change; you're too much alone. Now I've come——"

"Oh, yes, you've come, and on a deuced friendly visit too."

"Business and friendliness combined, my dear sir. Why, you used not to snub me like this. There, I meant to chat over a little money matter with you. Let's do it pleasantly. Come up to that capital table, and let's do it over a friendly game of billiards."

Tom Candlish started from his seat, overturning his glass, which fell to the floor, and was shattered to atoms.

"My dear Sir Thomas! what is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing," he replied hoarsely. "Not well yet. A confounded spasm."

"How unfortunate! Let me refill your glass, or shall I do it upstairs in the billiard-room?"

"Curse the billiards! I tell you I don't play now."

"Not play?"

"The sight of the balls rolling makes me giddy," cried the wretched man, glaring at his visitor.

"Why, my dear sir, I'm very sorry I mentioned the game. There, let me give you a light. You're out. That's it. Really you ought to have the advice of a doctor."

"D—n all doctors!" growled the baronet again.

"I can't afford to have you ill, my dear Sir Thomas," said Thompson, with an unpleasant laugh.

"No, you can't afford to have me ill. Too good a cow to milk."

Cousin Thompson laughed, and felt that he had made a mistake.

"I cannot advise you to have my cousin up, because he, too, is ill."

Tom Candlish's lips parted to utter a fierce oath, but he checked it, and swung himself round in his chair.

"Is he very ill?" he said eagerly.

"Yes; he seems to me to be very ill."

"I'm glad of it—I'm very glad of it," cried Candlish. "Come, you needn't stare at me. I wish the beast was dead."

"I was not staring at you," said Cousin Thompson; "only listening. I think you and he don't get on well; but he's a very clever man—my cousin Horace; and if I could get a little advice from him on your case, I'm sure I would."

"I want no advice. Only a little time. I'm coming round, I tell you—fast. But about North. Is he very bad?"

"Well, ye—es; I should say he was very bad."

"What's the matter? Has he caught some fever?"

"No. Oh dear, no! It's mental. He

seems a good deal unstrung. A little off his head, perhaps."

"Why, curse it all, Thompson," cried Candlish excitedly; "you don't mean that the blackguard is going mad?"

"My dear Sir Thomas—my dear Sir Thomas." said the lawyer, in a voice full of protestation; "I really cannot sit here and listen to you calling my cousin a blackguard."

"Then stand up, man, and hear it. He is a blackguard, and I hate him, and I'd say it to his face if he were here. Now tell me, is he really bad?"

"Only a temporary attack. He is suffering, I'm afraid, from overstudy. But now to business."

"Stop a minute, man: let me think. Hang the business! How much is it? I'll write you a cheque. I can now, Thompson, old chap. Times are altered, eh?"

"Ah, and for the better, Sir Thomas."

"Here, hold your tongue. Don't talk. Let me see: not married; neither chick nor child; no brother. Why, Thompson, if North

—curse him!—died, you'd have the Manor House!"

"Should I!" said Cousin Thompson, raising his eyebrows thoughtfully. "Well, yes, I suppose I am next of kin. But Horace North will outlive me."

"Is he quite off his head?"

"Hush! don't talk about it, my dear sir. Poor fellow, he is ill; but not so very bad. I shouldn't like it to get about amongst his patients. People chatter and exaggerate to such an extent."

Tom Candlish smoked furiously for a few moments, and then cast away the end of his cigar, and lit another, biting the end, and frowning at his visitor.

"Now about business," said Thompson, at last.

"Curse business!" cried the squire, as he kept on watching the lawyer keenly. "Look here, Thompson, how was it that you two being cousins, he has so much money, and you're as poor as Job?"

"Way of the world, my dear sir—way of the world."

Tom Candlish sat back, chewing the end of his cigar and smoking hard.

"Look here, you Thompson! Now out with it; you don't like Dr. North?"

"Like him? I hate all doctors; just as you do."

"That's shuffling out of it," said Candlish scornfully; "but you needn't be afraid of me. I'm open enough. I'm not above speaking out and telling you I hate him. I wish you'd make a set on his pocket, and bleed him as you are so precious fond of bleeding me."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense!" said Cousin Thompson laughingly; and then the two men sat smoking and gazing one at the other in silence till their cigars were finished.

"Take another," said the squire, handing the case lying upon the table.

Thompson took another, and Tom Candlish lit his third, to lie back in his chair, smoking very placidly, and staring from time to time at Thompson, who watched him in turn in a very matter-of-fact, amused way.

They rarely spoke, and when they did it

was upon indifferent themes; but by degrees a mutual understanding seemed to be growing up between them, dealing in some occult way with Horace North's health and his position in Duke's Hampton. The Manor House estate, too, seemed to have something to do with their silent communings.

This lasted till the lawyer's second and the squire's third cigar were finished, and a certain amount of liquid refreshment had been consumed as well. Then Cousin Thompson suddenly threw away the stump of tobacco-leaf he had left.

"Now suppose we finish our bit of business?"

"All right," said Candlish sulkily; and after reference to certain memoranda laid before him, he opened a secretary, wrote a cheque, and handed it to the lawyer.

"Thanks; that's right," said the latter, doubling the slip, and placing it in his pocket-book.

"Going back to town to-night?" said Candlish.

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"No."

"When then?"

"Depends on how matters turn out," said Thompson meaningly. "I suppose if I wanted a friend I might depend on you?"

"Of course, of course," cried the squire eagerly.

"Thanks," said Cousin Thompson. "I shall not forget, but I don't think I shall want any help. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Tom Candlish warmly.

A wish of a mutual character, expressed in a contraction—that God might be with two as utter scoundrels as ever communed together over a half-hatched plot.

"Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson, as he entered the Manor that night, "I have been thinking over matters, and you need not say much to your master, but I feel it to be my duty to stay here for the present, and look after his affairs."

"But really, sir——"

"Have the goodness to remember who you are, Mrs. Milt. Leave the room!"

"And him going about in the dark watches of the night like a madman," sighed Mrs. Milt, as soon as she was alone. "If that wretch sees him, what will he think?"

"That wretch," to wit, Cousin Thompson, was biting his nails in North's library, and listening to a regular tramp upstairs.

"Strange thing," he said, "but as soon as a man's head is touched, he grows more and more like a four-footed beast."

He smiled and listened. All was very still now, and he set to work searching drawers and the bureau for material that might be useful to him in the settlement of Horace North's affairs, and as he searched he talked to himself.

"Let me see: it was Nebuchadnezzar — wasn't it?—who used to go about on hands and knees eating grass."

He examined a document or two, but did not seem satisfied with the result.

"Hah! poor Horace!" he said. "I'm very sorry for him, but I must do my duty to society, and to him as well."

He started, for the door-handle had been touched, and, quick as lightning, he dropped the papers he held, and blew down the chimney of the lamp.

The door cracked, and as it opened slightly he could hear the church clock chiming, and then a deep-toned *one* boomed forth.

There was a something beside sound entered, for by the faint light which streamed in over the top of the shutters he could see a dark blotch moving slightly, and, as he felt chilled to the marrow, the dark patch changed slowly to a dimly-seen face of so ghastly a kind that he stood there gazing wildly, and fixed helplessly to the spot.

CHAPTER IX.

COUSIN THOMPSON'S TOOTH-ACHE.

Regularly day after day.

The restless, wild-beast pace went on upstairs with intervals hour after hour, as, for the first time for many years, Horace North felt the terrible side of his lonely life, and the want of some one in whom he could really confide — mother, wife, sister — who would believe in him fully; but there were none.

His life of study had made him self-sustaining until now. He had had no great call made upon him. But now there was the want, and he sat for hours thinking of his state, only to spring up again and tramp his room.

To whom could he fly for counsel—Salis? The old housekeeper? The old doctor in London? Thompson, his cousin, then in the place?

"No, no, no! How could I explain myself? If I told all my feelings, all I have done, they would say that I was mad.

"It is impossible to speak," he panted. "I am chained—thoroughly chained."

He paused in his wearying tramp, for, like a light, there seemed to come in upon him the soft, sweet face of Mary, with her gentle look and luminous eye. She might help him, poor suffering woman. But no, no, no! It was impossible: he could not speak.

The time had come round again when, to relieve the terrible tedium of his life, he went out of his room—waiting always till the house was silent and all asleep.

He opened his door and went out cautiously, to descend to the hall, and after hesitating for a few minutes, he laid his hand upon the fastening of the front door, as if to go out, but shook his head and turned away.

Going silently into the cheerless drawing-room, he paced that, and then the dining-room in turn, till, wearying of this, he crossed to the study to open the door, paused for a moment or two, startled by the loud crack it gave, for the study seemed associated in his mind with the horror of the position he had brought upon himself.

Then, thrusting in his head slowly, it seemed to him that he was at last free, for there before him, embodied for the time, was Luke Candlish rising from a chair, much as we had last seen him at his home; and as he gazed wildly at the face dimly seen in the dark, it seemed to him the time had indeed come when he could crush his haunting enemy beneath his heel, and, rushing forward, he tried to catch him by the throat.

"Now," shouted North fiercely, "I have given you back your life; take it, and give me back mine in rest and peace, or, as I restored, so will I destroy."

His hands dropped to his side, and he uttered a low moan and shrank away.

Not that it was all imagination, for he knew that he had tightly grasped a living, breathing form, which had uttered a cry of dread, and then exclaimed:

"Horace—Horace, old fellow, are you mad?"

There was a loud rustling, a faint rattling sound, as North staggered to the side of the room and sank upon the couch. Then came a scratching noise, the flash of a match, and the tiny wax light emitting a bluish flame threw up the pale, smooth face of Cousin Thompson, whose eyes were dilated with fear.

He hurried to the chimney-piece, and lit one of the candles in a bronze stand.

"Why, Horace, old fellow, what are you about?" he cried, trembling. "Thank goodness, it is you."

North muttered some words inaudibly, afraid to trust himself to speak, and covered his face with his hands.

"Why, what's the matter, old fellow?" said Thompson, laughing. "Oh, I see; you've been shut up so long, you can't bear the light. How ridiculous, isn't it?"

North remained silent.

"I heard a noise, and knowing you were ill, felt it my duty to come down. I could tell that some one was prowling about, and backed in here with my fist ready doubled to strike, but you were too quick for me. I'm glad I spoke."

Still no answer.

"By Jove! what a joke! You took me for a burglar; I took you for one. What a blessing that we were not armed!"

"Armed?" said North slowly.

"Yes. Why, you might have sent a bullet through me. Well, I am glad that confounded tooth kept me awake. It has given me a chance of seeing you. Why, I had only just lain down in my clothes, after stamping about the room till I was afraid I should disturb the house. Give me something for it, there's a good fellow."

North hesitated for a few moments, trembling lest he should say words that would excite his cousin's attention; but at last he rose with one hand across his eyes.

"What, are your eyes so bad?" said Cousin Thompson.

"Yes," was the laconic reply; and North went to the surgery, took a small bottle from a drawer, the clink of a stopper or two was heard, and a peculiar smell arose, as Thompson noted, with eager eyes, how his cousin kept his back to him while dropping a small quantity from each of the bottles he took down.

"Can you see?" said Cousin Thompson, holding the candle.

"Yes, I can see, thank you," said North, replacing the bottles on the shelf, and fitting a cork to that he held, before labelling it "poison."

"Rub a little of that upon the outside of your face; it will allay the pain."

"It's awfully good of you," said Thompson smoothly, "specially now you're so ill. Thanks. Rub a little outside, don't you say? I suppose this 'poison' is only a scarecrow. It wouldn't hurt me if I took the lot."

"No," said North quietly. "It would

not hurt you. The sensation would be rather pleasant."

"I thought as much," said Cousin Thompson, who, while he played with the bottle, watched North narrowly.

"But," added the doctor impressively, "I should make my will first, if I were you."

"Why?"

"Because to-morrow morning you would be past the power of doing so."

"Oh, I say, old fellow, is it so bad as that? Make my will, eh? Physician, heal thyself! Why, you haven't made yours."

"No," said North quietly; "I have not made mine. Good night, I am going to my room."

"One moment — shall I see you to-morrow?"

"No."

"Well, the next day, then?"

"Doubtful," said North hurriedly, and he walked brusquely by his cousin to hurry to the staircase, and up to his own room.

"I thought not," muttered Cousin Thompson. "That was a good bold shot right in

the bull's-eye. Now, Master Horace, the old adage is going to be proved. Every dog has his day, and this dog is going to have his. How many times have you lent him money in a cursed grudging, curmudgeon-like spirit? How often have I come here, worn out with worry and scheming to get an honest living, and you have received me—you rolling in riches—with a churlish hospitality such as I should have thrown back at you if I had not been so poor? Never mind, my dear boy; the world turns round, and those who are down to-day are up to-morrow. I can make Squire Tom squeak to a pretty tune whenever I like, and the widow—well, she's not a bad sort of woman to come and sit in the nest she has helped to line. 'Manor House, Duke's Hampton: Manor House, Duke's Hampton!' Not a bad address. There are worse things than being a country gentleman—county magistrate is the proper term. Yes, my dear cousin, things look brighter than they have looked for years. What a blessed thing is the British law, especially where a medical

question comes in. The fruit's about ripe, and if I do not stretch out my hand to pick it, why, I must be a fool."

"Fool!" he said, as he stood there smiling, with the lighted candle in his hand, casting strange shadows upon the lower portions of his countenance. "Fool—fool—fool! No," he said softly, as he shook his head. "I have a few failings: I am a little weak. I admire a soft, plump, pleasant-looking widow — with money — like Mrs. Berens. I like money — plenty of money, and I like Duke's Hampton; but those are only amiable weaknesses, and I don't think I'm a fool."

He held up the candle and looked round as if enjoying the sense of possession, and his eyes rested on the good old-fashioned furniture, the choice selection of books, a bronze or two, and a couple of paintings by a master hand: all of which his twinkling eyes seemed to appraise and catalogue at a glance.

"Yes," he said, smiling softly, "things look a good deal brighter now, and I like

Duke's Hampton quite well enough to come and live in—with a wife."

He took a step or two towards the door, and paused once more, evidently enjoying his self-communings.

"*No!* There was a decision about that *no* which I liked, my dear cousin. No: he has not made his will. But it does not matter, my dear boy—not in the least, for, as far as I know, you are not going to die."

His face lost its smile here, and he took the little bottle he had received softly from his pocket, and held it to the light.

"*Poison. For outward application only.*"

He read the words slowly.

"Yes," he said, "that would be a dangerous thing in the hands of some men who saw a life standing between them and a goodly property. But no, my pretty drops! You may go back again. Not for me. I am a lawyer, and I know the law. What idiots some men have been, and at what cost to themselves! But, then, they were not lawyers, and did not know the law. Now, then, for a good night's rest. And to-morrow. Hah!"

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT IN THE DARK.

"I DON'T like it, Mary. North has completely shut himself up. He will not even see Mrs. Milt, so she tells me, and she is getting very uneasy about his state."

Mary looked up at her brother. She could not trust herself to speak.

"I pity him, and yet I feel annoyed and hurt, for I gave him credit for greater strength of mind."

Mary felt that she knew what was coming, but she dared not open her lips.

"Of course it was very painful to find out the woman he had made his idol was trifling with him, but I should have thought that Horace North would have proved him-

self to be a man of the world, borne his burden patiently, and been enough of a philosopher to go on his way without breaking down."

"But he is very ill."

"Ill!" said Salis. "I feel disposed to go and shake him, and rouse him up. To tell him that this is not manly on his part."

"And yet you own that he is suffering, Hartley."

"Suffering? Yes; but he has no business to be suffering about a woman like—there, there, I am forgetting myself. Poor fellow! he must be very ill. You see, the upset came when he was worn out with the study and intricacies of that pet theory of his, and hence it is that he is now so low."

Mary lay back with her eyes half closed for some time, and there was silence in the room.

"Where is Leo?" said Salis, at length.

"In her room—reading."

"Thank Heaven she seems to be settling down calmly now. Surely this life-storm is past, Mary."

"I pray that it may be, Hartley," she said softly; but there was a shadow of doubt in her words.

"Well," said Salis, rising, "I must go and have a look round."

"Going out, dear?"

"Yes. I seem to have been very neglectful of the people lately."

"Stop a minute, Hartley," said Mary, with a vivid colour in her cheeks.

"You want to say something?"

"Yes, dear; I wish—I wish to speak to you about Dr. North."

"Well, what about him, my child?"

"Hartley, when we were ill, he was always here. No pains seemed to be too great for him to take."

"Yes, no man could have been more attentive."

"And now, Hartley, he, too, is ill—seriously ill."

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"Then don't you think it is a duty to try everything possible to help him in turn?"

"Of course, and I have tried; but what can I do? He will not see me, and that cousin of his, who, by the way, seems to have a great deal of business with Mrs. Berens, evidently does not want me there."

"But ought you to study that, Hartley, when your friend is ill?"

"I have thought all this out, Mary, and I feel sometimes as if I could do nothing. You see it is like this: I feel certain that North does not want to see me."

"Why, dear?" said Mary earnestly.

"Because it reminds him too much of his trouble with Leo. He feels that very bitterly, and I know my presence would bring it up. Would it not be better to keep away, and let his nerves settle themselves?"

"No," said Mary, in a quiet, firm way. "It was no fault of yours. It was Dr. North's own seeking, and he needs help. Go to him, Hartley."

"Go to him?"

"Yes. He must be in sore trouble in every way. You say his cousin is there?"

"Yes, and if I went much I should quarrel with that man."

"No, no; you must not quarrel. But recollect how Horace North used to say that he felt obliged to be civil to him, but he wished he would not come."

"Yes: I remember."

"Then go to him, and be at his side, dear, in case he requires help and counsel. Remember you are his friend. Even if he seemed querulous and fretful, I should stay."

"You are right, Mary; I'll go. I shall have some one to help me in Mrs. Milt. I will stand by him."

Mary's eyes brightened, and she held out her hand.

"He will thank you some day, dear; even if he seems strange now."

"He may say what he likes and do what he likes," said Salis warmly. "I ought not to have needed telling this; but I'm going to make up for past neglect now and play the part of dog."

Salis was a little late in his promise to

play the part of watch-dog for his friend, for as he walked up to the Manor House it was to meet a carriage just driving out.

"The fly from the 'Bull' at King's Hampton and a pair of horses," said Salis as he walked on, apparently paying no heed to the inmates of the carriage. "Now, whoever would these be? White cravat, one of them; the other thin, spare, and dark. Doctors, for a sovereign, I'd say, if I were not a parson."

Mrs. Milt opened the door to him, and showed him into the drawing-room, whose window looked down the back garden with its great clump of evergreens and shady walks, beyond which were the meadows through which the river ran.

"I'm very glad," said Salis eagerly; "your master has had a couple of doctors to see him, has he not?"

"No, sir; oh, dear, no!" said the housekeeper sadly. "If you would only see him, and persuade him to, and get him to see a clever man, sir, it would be the best day's work you ever did."

"I'll try, Mrs. Milt," said Salis; "but I'm disappointed."

"So am I, sir. He wants doing good to, instead of trying to do good to other people. Those are some friends of Mr. Thompson, sir. One of them's got a very curious complaint that Mr. Thompson said master was almost the only man who knew how to cure."

"And did he see them?"

"Yes, sir, after a great deal of persuasion, and almost a quarrel, sir. I could hear master and Mr. Thompson, sir, talking through the door, and he said master ought to be ashamed of himself if he let a gentleman who was suffering come down from town and drive all the way across from King's Hampton in the hope of being cured, and then let him go back without seeing him."

"Yes, Mrs. Milt; go on," said the curate eagerly.

"Well, sir, after a long fight Mr. Thompson went away, but he went and tried again and master gave way directly, and went

down in his dressing-gown, looking all white and scared, and saw those two gentlemen who have just gone away."

"Well, I'm glad of that—heartily glad," said Salis. "It is the thin end of the wedge, Mrs. Milt, and we have good cause to be grateful to Mr. Thompson for what he has done. Seeing patients again! This is good news indeed. He will see me now."

Mrs. Milt shook her head.

"I'm afraid not, sir."

"I must be a patient."

"You, sir? Why, you look the picture of health."

"But I have been very patient, Mrs. Milt," said Salis, laughing.

"Ah, sir, and so have I," said the housekeeper dolefully; "and a deal I've suffered, what with master's illness, and my conscience."

The old lady put her apron to her eyes, and gave vent to a low sob.

"Your conscience, Mrs. Milt," said Salis, smiling. "Why, I should have thought that was clear enough."

"Clear, sir? Oh, no! It's many a bitter night I've spent thinking of my temper, and the way I've worried poor master when he's had all his work on his shoulders. I've helped to make him what he is. Oh, there's that man, sir!"

She drew the curate within and closed the door, for steps were heard, and Cousin Thompson passed round from the back-garden to go down to the gate.

"He's gone out, sir; and I'll try now if master will see you. It worries him dreadfully his cousin being here, and it always did."

Closing and fastening the door the housekeeper led the way to the first-floor landing, and, signing to Salis to be silent, she tapped gently at the doctor's door.

The moment before they had faintly heard the sound of some one pacing to and fro, but at the first tap on the door this ceased. There was no answer.

The housekeeper knocked again, and in simple, old English, country fashion called gently:

"Master, master!"

Still there was no response; but she persevered, and knocked again.

"Master, master!"

"Yes, what is it?" came from within; and Mrs. Milt turned and gave the curate a satisfied nod, as she said:

"Mr. Salis, sir. He would like to see you."

There was a pause, and then hoarsely:

"Tell Mr. Salis I am ill, and can see no one."

The curate was about to speak, but Mrs. Milt hastily raised her hand.

"But I'm sure he'd like to see you very much, sir. Mr. Thompson's gone out."

"Tell Mr. Salis——"

There was a pause, and the curate went close to the door.

"North, old fellow," he said gently; "don't turn your back on all your friends. What have I done to be treated thus?"

There was another pause, during which those on the landing listened anxiously for some response from within.

But all remained perfectly still, and Salis ventured to appeal again.

"I will not stop longer than you like, old fellow," he said; "but I am uneasy, and——"

He was interrupted by the sharp snap made by the lock of the door. Then the handle was turned, and a long slit of darkness was revealed.

"Come in," said a harsh voice; and Salis turned and gave Mrs. Milt a satisfied nod and smile, as he entered North's room and closed the door.

The sensation was strange, that passing from broad daylight into intense darkness, and Salis tried to recall the configuration of the room, and the position of window and bed, as he felt North brush past him, and lock the door.

For it was evident that an attempt had been made to exclude every ray of light, and not without success.

"Well, I am glad—I was going to say to see you, old fellow," cried Salis. "Hadn't

you better open the curtains and the window? This room smells very faint."

"Brandy spilt," said North, alluding to his accident of many days before.

"Brandy? Why, the place smells of laudanum and chloroform, and goodness knows what besides."

"You wanted to speak to me," said North.

"Yes, I've a great deal to say; but I should like to sit down."

"There is a chair on your left."

"Ah, yes. Thanks," said Salis, feeling about until he touched it, and sitting down. "Where are you?"

"Sitting on the bed."

"Well, I suppose you have a reason for this blind-man's-buff work. Eyes bad?"

"Very."

"May I say a few words to you about getting advice?"

"Aren't you afraid of shutting yourself up with me here in the dark? There are razors in that drawer. There's a bottle of

prussic acid on the dressing-table. Why, parson, you're a fool!"

The voice seemed changed, and this speech was followed by a curious mocking laugh which ran through Salis and made him shrink; but he recovered himself directly.

"No," he said stoutly; "I am not afraid."

"No, you are not afraid," came softly from out of the darkness.

"Come, North, old fellow," continued Salis; "we are old friends. You have helped me when I have been in sore distress; forgive me, now that I know you are in trouble, for thrusting myself upon you."

"I have nothing to forgive."

"Then let me help you. Believe me that Mary and I are both terribly concerned about your health. Tell me what I can do."

There was a pause; then a low, piteous sigh; and from out of the darkness came the word—

"Nothing!"

"I can't understand your complaint, of course, old fellow; but tell me one thing.

Are you sufficiently *compos mentis* to know what to do for yourself for the best?"

"Quite, Salis, quite," said North slowly.

"And you are ill, and are carrying out a definite line of action?"

"I am doing what is really—what is for the best."

"And you do not need help—additional advice?"

"If I did, a letter or telegram would bring down a couple of London's most eminent men; but they could do nothing."

Salis sighed.

"But can I do nothing?"

"Only help me to have perfect rest and peace."

"But about your patients? Moredock is complaining bitterly."

"My patients must go elsewhere," said North slowly. "I cannot see anybody."

"Don't think I am moved by curiosity; but are you sure that you are doing what is best for yourself?"

"Quite sure. Let me cure myself my own way, and—and——"

"Well—what, old fellow?" said Salis, for the doctor had ceased speaking.

"Don't take any notice of what I say at times. I've—I've been working a little too hard, and—at times——"

"Yes, at times?"

"I feel a little delirious, and say things I should not say at other times—times I say, at other times."

There was a singularity in his utterance, and his repetitions, which struck Salis; and these broken sentences were strange even to the verge of being terrible, coming as they did out of the darkness before him.

"Oh, yes; I understand," he hastened to say cheerfully. "I know, old fellow. Want a wet towel about your head and rest."

"Yes—and rest," said North quietly.

"Rest and plenty of sleep. I set your disorder down to that," said Salis, as a feeling of uneasiness which he could not master seemed to increase. At one moment he felt that his friend was not in a proper condition to judge what was best for him; at another he concluded that he was; and that, after all,

it was a strange thing that a man could not do as he liked in his own house, even to shutting himself up in a dark room to rest his eyes.

A strange silence had fallen upon the place, and, in spite of his efforts, Salis could not bear it. A dozen subjects sprang to his lips, and he was about to utter them, but he felt that they would be inappropriate; and as North remained perfectly silent, and the uneasy feeling consequent upon sitting there in the darkness, conversing, as it were, with the invisible, increasing, Salis rose.

"Well," he said, "I'm glad I came, old fellow. I haven't bothered you much?"

"No."

"And I may come again?"

A pause. Then—

"Yes."

"And you'll see me?"

"I cannot see you. I shall be glad if you'll come. I feel safer and better when you are here."

Salis winced a little. Then a thought struck him.

"Look here, old fellow. Come and stay with us for a change."

North seemed to start violently, and Salis felt how grave a mistake he had made. For the moment he had forgotten everything about Leo, and he bit his lip at his folly.

"No. Go now."

"Will you shake hands?"

"No, no," said North passionately. "Go, man; go now. Don't come again for some days."

"As you will, North; only remember this —a message will fetch me at any time. You will summon me if I can be of any use?"

North seemed to utter some words of assent, and then Salis heard a faint rustling sound approaching in the darkness, which, in spite of his manhood and firmness, made the curate wince, as he felt how much he was at North's mercy if this complaint took an unpleasant mental turn.

But the rustling was explained directly after by the click of the door-lock. Then a pale bar of light shone into the room as the opening enlarged, and as it was evidently held

ready Salis passed out, the door closed sharply behind him, the lock snapped into its place, and he shuddered as he heard a low, mocking laugh, followed by the vibration of the floor as the invalid began to pace rapidly up and down.

"What ought I to do?" muttered Salis, as he stood irresolutely upon the mat, till he felt a touch upon his arm, and, turning, found that Mrs. Milt had evidently been waiting for him to come out.

"Well, sir?" she whispered, as they went down.

"Well, Mrs. Milt?"

"You don't think that he is—a little—you don't think that is coming on?"

"What, lunacy?"

The housekeeper nodded.

"Absurd, Mrs. Milt!" cried Salis, "absurd!"

"Thank goodness, sir!"

"A little out of order and eccentric. But what made you ask that question?"

"Well, sir, it was something Mr. Thompson said."

CHAPTER XI.

SALIS MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"I CANNOT interfere, really, my dear Mary —I cannot interfere. Mrs. Berens is a friend of yours, and one of my parishioners, but what can I do?"

"She is alone in the world, and in great trouble."

"But here is a foolish woman; goes and listens to a plausible lawyer, and makes at his suggestion a number of investments, and then repents and comes to the parson."

"Well, to whom better?" said Mary, smiling.

"For advice over her sins it would be right enough," said Salis.

"I don't think Mrs. Berens has any. If so, dear, they must be only small ones."

"But to come to the parson for help on money matters is absurd. This is the third time she has been."

"Yes, dear."

"It is not as if the investments had gone wrong."

"No, dear; she mistrusts Mr. Thompson."

"Perhaps without reason. Let her get the money back, then, at as little loss as she can, and put it in consols."

"There, you see, you can give good advice, Hartley."

"Oh, any noodle could give advice like that. It isn't perfect."

"No, dear," said Mary sadly; "for Mrs. Berens says that this Mr. Thompson tells her it is impossible to withdraw now, and it seems he has been very angry with her—almost threatening."

"Confound his insolence!"

"He told her she ought not to have invested if she meant to change her mind, and that she is making a fool of him."

"Impossible!" said Salis sharply. "She might make him a rogue."

"You will help her, will you not, Hartley?"

"Well, I'll see what I can do; but I shall be an unfair advocate, for I hate that man."

"And you will go and see Mr. North today."

"Perhaps," said Salis. "He faithfully promised to send for me when I could be of any use, and I may do more harm than good by forcing myself there."

Three days had passed since the last visit, and the suspicions which had flashed through the curate's brain had faded away as soon as he had found himself questioned by Mary, and felt how much she would be alarmed if he alluded to several little matters in connection with his interview.

"The fact is," he had said to himself, "my imagination is too active, and I am ready to invent horrors and troubles which are never likely to exist."

It had been a busy morning, for one of the rector's customary lectures on the management of the parish had arrived; and it was only by Mary's special request that a sharp

retort had not been sent back to a remark in the rector's letter to the effect that he was glad Mr. Salis had taken his advice respecting his sister's appearance in the hunting-field, and had put down the unnecessary horse.

"It makes me feel disposed to go and borrow of Horace North, and immediately set up a carriage and pair, with servants in livery of mustard and washing blue."

This was an attempt at being comic in allusion to the rector's showy liveries, which generally created a sensation in King's Hampton when he came down to the neighbouring place and went for a drive.

Mary smiled and went on with her work.

"How is Leo this morning?"

"Much better, I think. She was sitting with me for a long time yesterday evening. Hartley, I am sure she is undergoing a great change."

"I am very glad, dear," said Salis sadly.

"She seemed so quiet and affectionate to me."

"Why, of course. Who would not be?" said the curate affectionately.

"She seemed unwilling to leave me, and kissed me very tenderly when she went to bed."

"I'm very glad, dear," said Salis; "but I wish she would give up confining herself so to her room. It will grow into a habit."

"Let us wait," said Mary.

"Yes, dear," said Salis, looking sadly from the window as he dwelt upon the lives of his two sisters. "Time cures a great many ills."

"Yes," said Mary gravely. "What did Moredock want this morning?"

"Wine," said Salis shortly. "And it's my belief the old rascal can afford to buy it far better than I can."

"And you gave him some?"

"No," said Salis, with a droll look; "the last bottle in number one bin, of the four we stood up six weeks ago, went to poor Sally Drugate."

"To be sure, yes," said Mary. "She had two of the others, had she not?"

"Yes, dear," said Salis, who was trying hard to get a hair out of his pen. "Old Mrs. Soames had the other. By the way,

Mary, oughtn't we to have laid down that wine?"

"I believe wine drinkers do generally lay down wine," said Mary, smiling. "But what difference does it make?"

"They say it keeps better," said the curate drily. "Ours keeps very badly. By the way, Moredock incidentally gave me a bit of news."

"What, dear?"

"Tom Candlish has gone from the Hall for a tour they say, to restore his health."

"Left the Hall?"

"Yes, and I hope it will be many months before he returns."

"Yes," said Mary softly; "it will be better. There, now you will go on and see Mr. North."

"Oh, dear! who would be a slave?" sighed the curate. "Yes, madam, I will go, and when I come back I ought to go and see Mrs. Berens, and then I shall be led into acts which will cause Mr. Thompson to commence an action against me. Result: ruin, and our quitting Duke's Hampton."

"Did you not say to me that your imagination was too active?" said Mary, smiling.

"Yes, I did. What then?"

"You were quite right," said Mary; "it is."

Salis laughed and went on his mission, but in half-an-hour he was back, and Mary looked up at him wonderingly.

"Back so soon?" she said; and then with her heart beating frightfully, and a look of agony in her face that came as a revelation to Salis, she stretched out her hands to her brother, her fingers twitching spasmodically, as she uttered a wild cry, which brought him to her feet.

"Mary! My dear child! Be calm!" he panted, for he was evidently out of breath.

"Speak!" she cried. "Have pity on my helplessness. I am chained here by my affliction, and depend on you alone. Don't torture me — don't keep me in suspense. Horace North?"

"Yes; only be calm, dear."

"You are temporising," cried the poor

girl wildly, as she clung to his hands and began to kiss them passionately. "Hartley—Hartley, for pity's sake, speak!"

"If you will only be calm," he cried angrily. "This is hysterical madness. You are hindering me when I come back to you for help and advice."

Mary uttered a piteous moan, and set her teeth, as she clung still to her brother's hands.

"Tell me the worst," she implored. "I can bear that more easily than this suspense."

Salis gazed at his sister more wildly, as he, for the first time, read, in her anguished looks and broken words, the secret which she had kept so well.

For the moment he was as one in a nightmare. He strove to speak, but something seemed to keep him dumb, while all the time she kept on moaning appeal after appeal to him to tell her all.

"I thought little of it then," he said; "but now the idea seems to have grown stronger and more terrible. Words he used which I did not heed then seem to bear a

terrible import now, and I cannot help thinking that something ought to be done."

"You saw him just now?" said Mary hastily.

"No, but I spoke with Mrs. Milt, and she is terribly uneasy. Mary, dear, for your own sake, spare me this."

"No," said the suffering woman sternly; "you can tell me nothing so bad as I shall imagine if you are silent. Tell me the very worst. He is dead?"

"No, no, no!" cried Salis; "but I fear for him. He is not in a condition to be left, and yet, strive how I may, I cannot get him to listen to reason."

"But you have not seen him again?"

"No; he is now shut up in the library, and Mrs. Milt has a terrible account of his eccentricity; she fears that he is going——"

"No, no, no! Don't say that," cried Mary; "it is too horrible. But quick! What are you going to do?"

"Drive over to King's Hampton, take the train to Lowcaster, and come back with two of the principal physicians."

"No," said Mary sharply. "Telegraph at once to Mr. Delton. Tell him his friend North is in urgent need of his help. He believes in North, and looks upon him almost as a son. His advice will be worth that of a dozen Lowcaster physicians."

"Mary, you're a pearl among women," cried Salis.

"Don't stop to speak," she cried, with an energy that startled him. "Your friend's life —his reason—is in peril. Go!"

"My friend; the man that poor broken-spirited creature loves," muttered Salis, as he hurried away, and was soon after urging his hired pony to a gallop.

"Oh, what moles we men are!" he said, as the hedges and trees flew by him. "But who could have suspected her of caring for him? Lying crushed and broken there, and no one suspecting the agonies she must have suffered."

Realising by slow degrees the depth of his sister's love for North, and the life she must have led, Salis urged the pony on to reach King's Hampton at last, and hurry to the

post-office, to despatch his telegram beseeching the old doctor to send a reply; and for this he determined to sit down and wait, but only to pace the coffee-room of the nearest hotel, with his mind a chaos of bewildering ideas, as he wondered what was to be the end of this new trouble which had come upon his house.

CHAPTER XII.

A STORMY INTERVIEW.

The old housekeeper had indeed a long series of eccentricities to record to Salis, speaking freely to him, as to her master's firmest friend, though what she knew and had diminished in intensity more than magnified was but a tithe of that which had occurred.

For it had been a terrible period for the young doctor. Half wrecked by the mental and bodily injuries he had received, the course he had pursued in shutting himself up alone, dreading to be surprised in suddenly uttering some wild speech or committing some vagary, had intensified the abnormal condition of his brain till his sufferings seemed to grow unbearable.

One hour he felt at peace, the next he had none, and asked himself what he was to do to escape the terrible unseen presence that was always with him, never addressing him, but, as it were, making his body the medium by which he communicated with the world.

"I can bear it no longer," North said to himself at last. "There must be rest for me if I cannot shake it off."

He shuddered slightly as he paced his darkened room, knowing instinctively how many steps to take in each direction, and what to avoid. For Death, familiar as it was to him, was not without its terrors.

He was so young, and, as it seemed now, the hopes of the past arose once more before him, the faith in the prizes of fame which he would win, his love for Leo, and the promises which had led him on.

But so sure as these thoughts assumed form there was another to rise like a dense cloud of horror and cover everything, as he felt that, come what might, he would be haunted ever by this unseen presence—the

spirit which he had freed from its envelope of clay—and this could have but one end.

He felt that he had tried everything. He had forced himself to calmness, and marked out course after course of treatment such as he would have prescribed to some poor wretch who had consulted him in such a case; and when all was still at night he had stolen down to his surgery, and mingled for his own use sedatives and tonics, but all to no effect. If anything, his malady increased.

Two days before Salis had gone over to King's Hampton, Cousin Thompson came once more to his bedroom door, to beg that he would come down and see his friend.

"It is impossible," he had replied hoarsely.

"But he has come down again, vastly improved by your treatment; and without you he feels that he would be a dying man. Come, you cannot refuse."

North held out for a time, and at last gave way, more from the desire of getting rid of his cousin and the patient than from any wish to repeat his advice.

"I'll come this time," he said; "but this visit must be final. There are hundreds of doctors who can advise the man better than I."

"Doubtless," said Cousin Thompson; "but that is not the point. There is not one in any of those hundreds in whom my poor friend will have the faith that he has in you."

The argument was unanswerable.

"I will be down in a few minutes," North said; and trying hard to master the nervous feeling which came over him, and wondering whether he could get through the interview without some absurd utterance, he drew aside the blind to accustom his eyes once more to the light.

It was some moments before he could face it, and then he looked despairingly at the wan, haggard face before him in the glass.

He shrank from it at first, but looked again and again, without the feeling of horror that had pervaded him before. His countenance was changed, and terribly wan

and drawn; eyes and cheeks were sunken, so that the former seemed set in deep, cavernous holes; but as he gazed he did not seem to dread the sound of mocking laughter, or of some strange utterance which he could not control, and proceeded to make himself somewhat more presentable for those below.

"And they come to me for help," he muttered, "who want it more than any man on earth."

As he opened his door he frowned, for he caught sight of the old housekeeper hastily beating a retreat, and a shiver ran through him as he felt how he was watched.

But he went on down into the hall, where a low murmur of voices told him that his visitors were in the drawing-room.

What followed was a matter of a minute or two.

He entered the room quickly, his coming having been unheard; and Cousin Thompson, who was speaking earnestly to the two gentlemen from town, started quickly away and then said hastily:

"Ah, North! Why, you seem better. Let me get you a chair. You want no introductions, and I'll leave you together."

He approached North with a chair, and the latter took it, gazing keenly at the visitors the while; but as Thompson was passing he caught him by the collar and checked him, holding him fast, as he threw the chair from him with a crash.

Thompson turned white as so much curd, and tried for a moment to extricate himself, but his cousin's grasp was like iron, and he turned a pitiable face to the two visitors, the taller of whom advanced quickly.

"My dear Dr. North," he said, "pray be calm. Another seat, my dear sir; pray sit down."

North seemed as if he had not heard him. He had searchingly gazed from one to the other, and then his eyes appeared to blaze as his left hand joined his right at Thompson's throat.

"You cursed, treacherous, cowardly hound!" he literally yelled, and dashing

him backward, so that he fell with a crash against a table, which was overturned, North strode from the room without another word, and made the house echo with the bang he gave the door.

Thompson did not attempt to rise till the visitors held out their hands to assist him to a couch.

"My dear sir, are you hurt?" asked the first man.

"Hurt!" cried Thompson savagely. "Could you be half strangled and then thrown down without being hurt? But you see now. You doubted before; you see now."

"Yes, perfectly," said the second visitor calmly. "Oh, yes, I think that we are quite satisfied now. What do you say?"

"Perfectly," said the first slowly; and as soon as the lawyer had satisfied himself that he was not seriously hurt, they adjourned to the library, where Mrs. Milt was summoned to provide sherry and biscuits; and soon after the two visitors re-entered their carriage, and were driven back to King's Hampton in time to catch the first train back to town.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. MILT TAKES UP LUNCH.

"THE last hope gone!" cried North, as he rushed upstairs and entered his room, to close and lock the door, overcome, as it were, with a despairing dread.

"I might have known it," he panted excitedly. "The cruel, treacherous hound! I might have known that he had some hidden meaning in what he was doing. Friend from town—no faith in any one but me, forsooth! And I such a miserable, easily deceived child that I was ready to believe it all."

Without thinking of what he did, he seated himself at the dressing-table, rested his elbows thereon, and gazed straight before

him in the glass, but without seeing his distorted, haggard face.

"And it has come to that!" he groaned. "He, in his cunning, is taking all the necessary steps, such as a legal practitioner would know to be necessary, and I am to be carried off on these men's certificates to some death in life, while my affectionate Cousin Thompson takes possession here.

"And he could," he mused; "everything has been arranged for him. I am not mad; I am perfectly sane, but, Heaven knows, I am acting like a madman—like one possessed. I go always with this terrible shadow enveloping me, and I cannot shake it off, try how I may.

"What shall I do?

"Salis! No, I cannot tell him. Mr. Delton? No, no, no! I could not speak out. What would they say? They must declare it to be a mania if I tell them the simple truth, and how dare I confess to having instituted those experiments on Luke Candlish?

"Was ever man so cursed for his endeavours? I have branded myself as one who is mad, and I must bear the stigma."

He clenched his fist and glared before him, recalling the scene in his drawing-room, and burst into a scornful laugh—a laugh so full of savage anger that he started and looked wildly about him in dread.

He calmed down though in a few minutes, and sat repeating the words that had passed.

"I must have been blind not to have seen it before," he cried aloud; "and now what is to follow?"

He looked up at the light shining down through the drawn curtain, and hurriedly shut it out, to reseat himself and think.

Flight! Yes, he could easily escape from his cousin and his machinations—the Continent—America — or he might boldly face him, and prove that the charge of lunacy was without basis.

But how, when he dared not show his face anywhere lest he should betray himself before his fellow-men?

"It is of no use," he sighed bitterly; "I am conquered and I must succumb.

"But Cousin Thompson?

"Curse him!" he cried passionately, as

he rose and began his old wild-beast tramp again. "What fate is too bad for such a man? Why did I not keep my hold when I had him by the throat?"

He stopped short, and in a paroxysm of mental agony threw himself upon a chair, nerveless, helpless, ready to give up and think that his cousin was right, and that the sooner he was placed under restraint the better, or else sought that other way of escape from his troubles.

As he writhed there in his agony, Mrs. Milt was coming up the stairs with a tray covered with a fair white napkin, and on which was a covered dish exhaling an odour which the old dame had settled in her own mind would be certain to tempt her master.

"Poor fellow!" she said to herself; "he's half starving himself, and perhaps I've done wrong in letting him have his own way. I ought to have gone up and made him eat. He'd have scolded and abused me, but I should have done him good."

Mrs. Milt had nearly reached the room, when she uttered an ejaculation of horror,

and, setting down the tray upon the carpet, ran swiftly back to close a baize door.

"If he heard it," she half sobbed, "he would think poor master mad, and heaven knows what would happen then."

She hurried again to where she had left the tray, and then on to the door, as from within she heard a wild burst of boisterous laughter, and then a fierce oath, and the sounds of a struggle, ending in a crash as of a table being overturned.

"What shall I do?" groaned the poor woman, as, for the moment, she clapped her hands to her face, and stopped her ears, but only to snatch them down wildly, as the strange sounds continued. "He must be alone here, and if I call for help they'll say he's mad."

She stood wringing her hands for a time as a terrible scene appeared to be taking place within that closed room. There was the trampling of feet—the sound as of a struggle. North's voice in angry denunciation of some one who kept bursting forth into mocking peals of laughter, and then

shouting as men shout when excited with the chase, till the room re-echoed. Then again North's voice came, as if speaking furiously in a low voice, which changed directly afterwards to one of piteous appeal, breaking off into a moan. As the doctor's voice ceased there was another mocking laugh, apparently from close by the door, and directly after came a crash as if a chair had been used as a weapon, a blow had been struck, and the chair shivered. While vividly painting the scene in her own mind, helped as she was by the sounds, the old housekeeper seemed to see her master hurl the portion of a broken chair which remained in his hands into the corner of the room, where it rattled upon the floor.

"There's murder being done," panted the old woman, as she caught at the handle of the door now, and stood clinging to it, while she pressed her other hand upon her heaving bosom.

As if in answer to her words, there was another coarse burst of laughter, and the sound of some one bounding to the door,

two hands seeming to shake the panel, and her master's voice came through, muffled but distinct.

"Curse you! I have you now! Is there no way of forcing you back into your grave?"

A loud rustling sound as of a struggle which was continued to the other side of the room, and the housekeeper's hair felt to her as if something cold and strange were moving it, while a deathly perspiration broke out upon her face.

"Who is in there with him?" she thought. "What does it mean? There must be some one there, and murder is being done. Help! help!" she shrieked in her agony of fear, as she rattled the handle of the door, and beat upon the panels. "Help! help!" and then in her horror she turned and staggered towards the stairs, as the door was flung open, she felt herself seized from behind and dragged into the room, the door swinging to, and she was forced backwards in the utter darkness, listening to the hoarse sound of the hot breath which fanned her cheek as a hand was pressed heavily over her mouth.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OPPORTUNE ARRIVAL.

"SILENCE, you mad woman! Do you want to bring them here? Do you want to have me dragged away like some miserable prisoner?"

"Oh, master—dear master," sobbed the frightened woman piteously, as the hand was removed from her lips, and she sank at North's knees and embraced them. "What does it all mean?—what does it all mean?"

"What does all what mean?"

"All that noise—that noise?" sobbed the housekeeper in a broken voice. "Have you —have you killed him?"

"Killed him?" cried North harshly. "Killed whom? There is no one here."

"There is—there is, sir. I heard it all."

"Hush!" cried North. "Listen. Is any one coming? Did they hear in the kitchen?"

"No, sir. I couldn't bear for any one else but me to hear it all," sobbed the trembling woman. "I went back and shut the door."

"Then no one has heard—no one knows—but you?"

"No, sir.'

"My cousin?"

"He has gone out, sir."

"Hah! Then it is a secret still," muttered North.

The old housekeeper struggled to her feet, for his words and manner horrified her. She alone had heard what had taken place, and it seemed to her that within a few steps her master's victim must be lying prone, and that even her life was not safe now.

Her first instinct was to make for the door, but he had hold of her wrist, and she sank once more at his feet, with a low sobbing cry.

"I'm an old woman, now," she cried,

"and a year or two more or less don't matter much."

The same harsh, mocking laugh broke out again, chilling her to the marrow, and then North uttered a hoarse, harsh expiration of the breath, and stamped his foot angrily.

Then there was a pause, broken only by the old woman's painful sobs.

"My poor old Milt," said North gently, as he raised her from the ground. "Why, what were you thinking—that I would do you any harm?"

"I—I couldn't help it, sir; but—but I don't think so now. Oh, master — dear master, I thought you had killed some one. What does it mean?—what does it mean?"

He did not answer for a few moments, and when he spoke again there was an indescribable, mournful sadness in his voice.

"What are you thinking?" he said.

She answered with a sob.

"I'll tell you," he said; "you think that I am mad."

"No, no, no! master—my great, clever, noble master," cried the old woman pas-

sionately. "Only ill—only very ill; and you can cure yourself. Yes, yes; pray say that you can!"

"No," he said bitterly. "No. It has come to the worst. There, go: I am worn out, and want to rest."

"But you will let me help you, dear," she said, speaking with the tenderness of a mother towards the boy she worshipped with a lavish love. "Let me do something—let me help you, dear. It is overwork. Your poor brain is troubled. Let me open the window, and let in light and air, and then you shall go to bed; and I'll bathe your poor head, and you shall tell me what to mix. You know how I can nurse and tend you now you are ill."

North took the old woman's head between his hands as they stood there in the darkness, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Yes, the best and gentlest of nurses," he said quietly.

"And you will let me help you, sir?"

"Yes; but not now. It was a kind of fit you heard—nothing more. Now go. See

that I am not disturbed. Perhaps I can sleep. There: you know there is no one here."

"Yes, my dear, of course—of course. I ought to have known better; I know now. And you will try to sleep?"

"Yes—I promise you, yes.

"Let me go down and get something for you; tell me what, and the quantities."

"Yes," said North eagerly, for she seemed to be opening before him the gates of release from his life of horror; but he shook his head as he called to mind how familiar she was with his surgery, and that if he bade her mix what he wished, she would turn suspicious and refuse.

"What shall I do, my dear?" said the old woman tenderly.

"Nothing now," he said; "sleep will be best. Let me go to sleep."

The old housekeeper sighed; but she made no opposition, and let him gently lead her to the door and shut her out, where she stood with her apron to her eyes, listening for a few moments to the loud snap given

by the lock, and the dull, low sound of his pacing feet.

Then the old woman seemed to change.

She let fall her apron and tightened her lips. Her eyes grew keen and eager, and she gazed straight before her, deep in thought.

In a few moments her mind was made up.

"He must have proper help," she said softly; and with an activity not to be expected of one at her time of life, she hurried up to her bedroom, to come out in a few minutes dressed for going out.

"I must fetch help," she said eagerly, and going to North's door she listened for a few moments more before hurrying down to the door, when a step on the gravel made her utter a cry of joy.

The man she was going to seek was coming up to the house, and the next minute she had confided to Salis all she felt and knew, and he had gone back to Mary, before hurrying away to telegraph to town.

CHAPTER XV.

DALLY'S PLANS.

"It's little better than murder: it's cruel, that's what it is. What does he mean by being ill and shutting hisself up, and won't see anybody? What right has a doctor to go and be ill? Yah!"

Old Moredock stared his clock full in the face as it ticked away slowly and regularly in the most unconcerned way.

"Yes! go it!" cried the old man, "go on marking it off, all your minutes and hours, but I don't mean to die yet, so you needn't think it. I'm not so old as all that, and if doctor 'll only get well, I'll astonish some on 'em."

He changed his position, stared at his fire,

and laboriously, and with many a groan, got down his old leaden tobacco box and pipe, filled slowly, lit up, and began to smoke; but somehow he did not seem to enjoy his pipe, and removed it again and again to go on muttering to himself.

"Well, suppose I did? A man must make a few pounds to keep himself out of the workhouse. They should pay the saxon better if they didn't want him to. Tchah! What's a few old bones?"

There was an interval of smoking, and then the old man resumed his complainings.

"Turning ill like that. What did he go and turn ill like that for, just as I wanted him so badly? It's too bad o' doctor. I wouldn't ha' let him go to the old morslem if I'd known he'd turn queer arterward. It's my b'leef that young Tom Candlish gave him an ugly knock that night. But I warn't there. Hi—hi—hi! I warn't there. I didn't want to be mixed up with it."

He shifted his seat, and as he did so painfully, his jaw dropped, and he sat fixed and staring at the window, where at one corner

there was a curious, rough-looking object, which remained stationary for some time and then moved slowly till first one and then a second eye appeared, gazed into the little cottage interior, and slowly descended again.

"Who—who—what's that?" faltered the old man. "Is it—is it—tchah! It's Joe Chegg, peeping and prying again to see if my Dally's here."

Recovering from his scare, the old man smoked away viciously for a time, and then grinned hideously.

"If I'd only been well," he muttered, "and that doctor had let me have some more of his stuff, I'd ha' took my spade and crope round by the back, and I'd ha' come ahint that iddit and give him such a flop. Sneaking allus after my Dally, as if it was like she'd wed a thing like him."

"Why don't doctor come?" he groaned, as a twinge made him twist painfully in his seat. "It's about murder: that's what it is; and they all want to get rid of me now—parson and all; and then things 'll go to ruin

about the old church. But they may get a new saxon if they like. Let 'em have Joe Chegg: I don't care. Much good he'll do 'em. Disgrace to the old church: that's what he'll be; and go in o' Sundays smelling of paint and putty, till he most drives Parson Salis mad. Disgrace to the church: that's what he'll be. Eh? eh? Who's that? Who's that? Hallo! Eh? Who's that at the door? You, Dally? Oh, you've come at last!"

"Yes, gran'fa, I've come at last," said the girl in a sullen tone.

"I might ha' died for all you'd ha' cared," grumbled the old man; "but I wouldn't—nay, I wouldn't do that."

Dally made no answer, but plumped herself down on the old shred hearthrug, and put her hands round one knee, so as to stare at the fire.

"Well," said the old man after a pause, "ain't you going to speak?"

Dally turned and looked at him sharply, with her brow knit and her mouth tightened up; but she only shook her head.

"Never been a-nigh me for three days," grumbled Moredock; "after all I've done for you. But don't you make too sure. Young 'uns often goes 'fore old folk, and maybe I'll bury you, and Joe Chegg too, if he don't mind what he's about."

Dally paid no heed, but stared at the fire.

"Seen doctor?" said Moredock.

Dally looked round again as if she did not quite hear his question, and then shook her head again.

"Never mind; I don't want him," grumbled the old man. "Let him doctor hisself. I'm not so bad but what I can get well without him. I'm not worn out yet! I'm not worn out yet!"

Dally paid no heed, and her curious attitude and her silence took the old man's attention at last. He reached round painfully till he could get hold of a thick oak stick, whose hook held it upon the back of the covered arm-chair.

With this the old man poked at his grandchild to draw her attention to him.

"Here, Dally, what's the matter? Here!"

"Don't!" cried the girl angrily; but he poked at her again.

"Don't, gran'fa! do you hear?" she cried, giving herself a vicious twist; but the old man only chuckled, and deliberately changing his hold upon his stick, he leaned forward, with one hand upon the arm-chair, till he could reach Dally easily as she crouched there, half turned from the old sexton, staring thoughtfully at the fire.

The old man chuckled softly as he extended the stick as a shepherd might his crook, till he could hook Dally by the neck, and drew her slowly towards him, grasping the stick now with both hands.

"Don't, gran'fa!" cried the girl fiercely, as she started up and took hold of the stick with both hands, getting her neck out of the hook, and struggling with her grandfather for its possession, in which she was triumphant, and ending by nearly dragging Moredock from his seat, as she made a final snatch, obtained the stick, and threw it viciously across the room.

"You—you—you nearly—you fetch that stick!"

"I won't stand it, gran'fa!" cried Dally, ignoring his command, and stamping her foot as she stared at him. "I won't have it! If he thinks he's got a baby to deal with, like Leo Salis, he's mistaken."

"Eh? eh?" croaked the old man, staring at her, and forgetting the stick, as he saw the girl's excitement.

"He's not going to play with me, gran'fa, and so I'll tell him."

"Eh? Who, Dally? Joe Chegg?"

"He said he'd marry me."

Then sharply:

"He's not going to play with me, and so I precious soon mean to tell him. He should marry me if I followed him all round the world for ever. There!"

She emphasized her words with a stamp, and then, taking the old man by the shoulders, she pushed him back in his chair, and arranged his collar and tie—the one, a limp piece of linen; the other, something a little more limp and loose.

"What's the matter, Dally? What's wrong, my gel?"

"After the way he has talked to me, and then to go off like that without a word!"

"But you don't want him, Dally, and I don't want him."

"Yes, I do; and I'll have him, too!" cried the girl, with savage vehemence.

"Nay, nay. He's an iddit."

"Yes, I know that," cried Dally vindictively; "and a drunken idjut; but I don't care for that."

"He was here to-night, staring in at the corner of the windy there."

"What, Tom Candlish?" cried Dally excitedly.

"Nay, nay; Joe Chegg."

"Joe Chegg!" cried Dally, in a tone of disgust that would have cut the village Jack-of-all-trades to the heart. "Who said anything about Joe Chegg? I was talkin' about young squire."

"Eh? About young squire? Well, Dally, well? When's it to be?"

"It's going to be soon, gran'fa, or I'll

know the reason why ; I'm not going to have him playing Miss Leo off against me."

"Nay, that I wouldn't, Dally," cried the old man.

"She's got to mind, or she may be ill again," cried the girl, with a vindictive look in her eyes.

"Ill again ! Has she, Dally ? Nay, nay, nay, my gel ; you mustn't talk like that."

"Mustn't I, gran'fa ? but I will," cried the girl. "I'm not going to be played with, and if Tom Candlish wants to drink himself into a coffin——"

"Eh ? What ?—what ?" cried Moredock, the last word making him prick up his ears. "Nay, nay ; don't you talk like that, my gel. He's a young, strong man yet."

"I say if Tom Candlish wants to drink himself into his coffin, he may. But he's got to make me Lady Candlish first."

"Lady Candlish of the Hall, eh, Dally ? Lady Candlish of the Hall ? Ay, ay ! Let him make you Lady Candlish first, Dally."

"Yes, and then he may drink himself into his coffin as soon as he likes."

"And I'll bury him, eh, Dally? In the old morslem, eh? And doctor can——"

He stopped short with a chuckle, and rubbed his hands.

"Yes, the doctor can try and stop him from drinking, for I can't," said Dally acidly. "It's of no use to talk to him."

"And you wouldn't break your heart, Dally, if he was to die, would you?" said the old man, with a chuckle.

"I should if he was to die now, gran'fa," said the girl; "but when he marries me he can do what he likes."

"Ay, when he's married you, Dally, and you've got the Hall and all his money. But, look here, Dally; I want doctor to come and see me and bring me some of his stuff. You go up and tell him he must come—that I say he must come; I want him. Tell him I say he is to come, and that he is to bring some o' that stuff he give me those nights. You say o' those nights, and he'll know. Rare stuff, Dally, as goes right down into your toes. Rare stuff, as

sets you up and makes you have a good nap sometimes."

Dally looked at the sexton searchingly.

"You're not looking well, gran'fa," she said.

"Nay, I look well enough, but I do want the doctor a bit."

"You see you're a very old man now."

"Tchah! stuff! Old? I'm not an old man yet. Lots o' go in me. Man takes care of himself, and he ought to live to two hundred."

"Two hundred, gran'fa!" cried the girl, looking at him wonderingly.

"Ay. Why not? Look at the patriarchs, seven and eight and nine hundred. I don't mean to die yet, Dally," he chuckled; "and you'll have a long time to wait if you think you want the bit o' money I've saved up."

"Where do you keep that stuff now, gran'fa?"

"What stuff?" said the old man.

"That stuff you used to keep in the blue bottle in the corner cupboard."

"How did you know I kept stuff in that corner cupboard?"

"Because I looked," said the girl pertly.

"Then I won't have you look in my cupboards. I——"

"Why not?" said Dally calmly. "There, I know, gran'fa, most everything you've got. Now, tell me, what have you done with that bottle that you used to use for your eyes?"

"Poured it away, and put the bottle in the fire."

"Oh, gran'fa!"

"My eyes are right enough now, and I didn't want to go some night in the dark —candles cost money, Dally—and take the wrong stuff. Doctor gives me some drops in a little bottle, and I shouldn't ha' liked to make a mistake."

"And you've thrown it all away?" said the girl in a disappointed tone.

"Ay, my gel. It was poison, only to use outside, and you wouldn't ha' liked your poor old gran'fa to make a mistake?"

"Gone!" said Dally, to herself.

"Now, you go to doctor and say your gran'fa wants him. Tell him I say it's all nonsense for him to be ill, and he must come."

"Yes, gran'fa."

"And you wait, Dally. I arn't an old man yet, but I shall be sure to die some day, and then there'll be a bit o' money for you."

"I don't want your money, gran'fa," she said sourly, as the old man grinned and rubbed his hands.

"That's right. Good gel. Be independent," he said. "Now go and tell doctor he must come."

Dally did not stir, but stood gazing straight before her thoughtfully.

"How much does it cost to go to London, gran'fa?" she said, at last, as the old man beat upon the arm of his chair to take her attention.

"Heaps o' money—heaps o' money. What do you want to know for?"

"Because I'm going there."

"Going? What for?

"To find him and bring him back."

"Whatcher talking about? You go and fetch doctor."

"About Tom Candlish. I went to the Hall last night, and he was gone."

"What, young squire? Well, you mustn't go after him, gel."

"Yes, I must," said Dally, with a lurid look in her dark eyes. "I'm going after him to bring him back here, gran'fa. But are you sure you threw that stuff away?"

"Ay, I'm sure enough. Now go and fetch doctor, I tell you; and ask him to give you some more of it if your eyes are bad. Now go."

Dally nodded shortly, neither displaying, nor being expected to display, any affection for her grandfather, as she left the cottage; when the old man relit his pipe and sat back thinking as he smoked.

"What does she want with that stuff?" he said thoughtfully; "'tis poison, and she knowed where it was. She wouldn't want to take none herself. She wouldn't do that; and she wouldn't want to give none to Tom

Candlish, because that wouldn't make him marry her. I dessay she wants it—she wants it—to——"

The old man's drowsy head had sunk back, his pipe-holding hand fell in his lap, and he slept heavily, to wake, after a few hours, cold and shivering, ready to creep to bed, murmuring against the doctor for not coming, and forgetting all about Dally and her desire to get that bottle which used to stand in the corner cupboard.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOREDOCK'S MEDICINE.

"It's like a shadow following me always," muttered North, "and it is hopeless for me to try longer. I've fought and battled with it as bravely as a man could fight, and for what? I have failed; there is nothing to keep me here. Why should I stay?"

"Yes," he repeated, "I have failed—failed in my daring attempt—failed in my love—and I want rest. I can bear it no longer; what I want is rest. Ah!"

He drew a long breath and then sighed, and went straight to the window, drew aside the curtain, and for the first time for many days spent about half-an-hour at his toilet, to stand at last, weak and ghastly pale, but

looking, otherwise, more like the frank, manly young doctor of the past.

By this time his eyes had grown more accustomed to the light, and he went and stood gazing out of the window at the pleasant woodland landscape spread before him, thinking of his future, and ignorant of the fact that the sight was soothing to his troubled brain.

It seemed to him that his shadow slept, and turning from the window, after a final look across the meadows, where now and again he could see the sun glancing from the stream in the direction of the Rectory, he walked, with a fair amount of steadiness, across the floor, just as the figure of a woman appeared in the lower meadow walking hurriedly and keeping close to the hedges and clumps of trees, which gave the place the aspect of a park.

As North opened the door and made for the stairs he could see that the baize door at the foot, which cut off communication with the rest of the house, was ajar, and then it moved slightly and closed.

"Watched," he said to himself; "poor old Milt! I must not forget her."

He went slowly down into the hall, and as he reached it the dining-room door, which was also ajar, closed softly, and North knit his brow and bit his lip as he turned his back to it and entered the study.

He closed and locked the door after him; and, as he did so, the housekeeper's face appeared at the baize door, and Cousin Thompson's at that of the dining-room.

Mrs. Milt noticed the movement of the dining-room door, and stole softly back with a sigh, while, after waiting for a few minutes, with a peculiarly low cunning expression of countenance, Cousin Thompson took a little brass wedge from his pocket, and stuck it beneath the door, so as to hold it a few inches open, sufficiently to enable him to hear when the study was opened again, and then seated himself watchfully by the window, where he could command a good view of the principal gate.

As soon as he was in the study, North looked sadly round at his books and tables,

where everything was methodically arranged, and scrupulously neat and clean, the old housekeeper's hand being visible on every side.

"Poor old woman!" muttered the doctor. "As if she felt sure that I should not be ill long."

He walked to the French window, which looked out upon the green lawn with its shrubbery surroundings, beyond which were the meadows and the purling stream.

It was a scene of peace and beauty that should have been welcome to the most exacting, and it was not without its effect upon the doctor, who carefully closed and fastened the window before crossing to the door leading into his surgery, which he opened, and looked in to see that the outer door was closed.

Returning to the study table, the baize communication swung to, and North sat down, quite calm and collected now, and began to write.

He paused to think several times, but only to go on more earnestly, till he had

done, when he read that which he had written, made a slight alteration or two, and then carefully folded and placed the papers in large envelopes, one of which he directed, "To my executors," and laid in a prominent place upon the table, where it could not fail to be seen; the other to his London medical friend.

Apparently not satisfied, he took up the envelope, and placed it in another, after which he wrote upon a sheet of paper:

"Mrs. Milt. Place this enclosure in my executors' hands yourself."

Then directing the outer envelope to the housekeeper, he smiled with satisfaction, and had just laid it upon the table, duly fastened down, when a faint *chink* made him turn his head in the direction of the surgery.

North listened, and the faint sound of a bottle touching another was repeated.

He rose and went softly to the door, which was not latched, opened it, and saw a hand dart down that was extended, as he stood face to face with Dally Watlock.

In his surprise North did not speak, for

he had been under the impression that he had fastened the door, and this gave the girl time to recover herself.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she said, with a smile; "I only pushed that bottle back in its place. It was nearly off the shelf."

"What do you want?" said North sharply.

"Gran'fa, please sir, said I was to come on and tell you he wanted you."

"Tell him I can't come," said North shortly. "Why did you come here, and not to the front?"

"Oh, wasn't this right, sir?" said Dally apologetically. "I am so sorry, sir. But gran'fa said: 'Go to Dr. North's surgery,' and I came here. Please, sir, he says you're to send him some of that same stuff you gave him before."

North stood with his brows knit for a moment, and then went to a cupboard, took out a bottle of brandy, half full, and handed it to the girl.

"Take that," he said, "and tell him to use it discreetly. I cannot come."

"Oh, thank you, sir. Gran'fa 'll be so pleased, sir; and master 'll be so glad when I tell him you're so much better; and Miss Mary, too."

North winced, and then frowned, as he passed the girl to open the outer door, and sign her to go.

She smiled and curtsied as she passed out, the door being closed sharply behind her, and she heard a bolt shoot.

"Yes," she muttered, with her countenance changing as she thrust the bottle carefully into her dress-pocket, with the result that there was another faint *chink;* "you may lock it now. I don't care. But wasn't it near?"

She hesitated for a moment, as if about to go out by the front, but Cousin Thompson was not puzzled by seeing her pass, for she returned by the way she came, down the kitchen garden to the meadows, and through them and down by the river till she reached the nearest point to the Rectory garden, through which she passed, after stopping to pick a handful of parsley to carry into the house.

CHAPTER XVII.

BESIEGED.

Dally had not reached the Rectory, and Horace North had not sat long thinking over the girl's words in a way which puzzled him, as it brought a curious feeling of rest and satisfaction to his brain, before a carriage came sharply along the King's Hampton road, and passed Moredock's cottage and Mrs. Berens' pretty villa-like home.

North was seated, with his head resting upon his hand, thinking.

Miss Mary would be so pleased, the girl had said—pleased that he was better.

It seemed strange to him, but the words set him picturing Mary Salis in the old days at the Rectory; then her accident, and how he had tended her. Then he thought of the

sweet, pale, patient face, as she passed through that long time of bodily suffering, to be followed by the lasting period of what must have been terrible mental anguish as she found herself to be a hopeless, helpless invalid—changed, as it were by one sad blow, from a young and active girl to a dependent cripple.

"Poor, gentle, patient Mary!" he said softly; and then, like a flash, his mind turned to the sister—her sick couch, her delirious declaration of her love, and his weak, blind folly in not grasping the fact that the tenderness she lavished upon him was meant for another.

"No, you can't. Master's better, and he's engaged, and can't see patients."

North started up on his seat, rigid, and with a wild look in his eyes, as he heard these loudly uttered words, and then sprang to the door.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Milt," said a soft, unctuous voice, which he knew only too well, "pray do not be excited. How can you speak like that?"

"I speak what I think and feel, sir," retorted the old lady sharply. "What do these people want with master?"

"To ask him to go and attend upon a patient who is in a dying state. There: pray come away. Really, Mrs. Milt, you must not interfere like this."

"I tell you, sir, master don't want to see patients, and he can't come out; so you must send them away."

"Really, Mrs. Milt," said Cousin Thompson, "this is insufferable. My good woman, you forget yourself."

Every word reached North as he stood close to the door and realised that there was one woman ready to fight in his defence.

North stood there, with his hands clenched and his brow rugged, glaring angrily, for he well knew what this meant. The voices were heard retiring, and the sound of the dining-room door closing, and muffling them suddenly, told him as plainly as if he had seen that the housekeeper had followed Cousin Thompson into that room, where an angry altercation seemed to be in progress.

"Hah!" ejaculated the miserable man; "canting and unscrupulous to the end. He is keeping her in parley while his people do their work."

He laughed bitterly, for at that moment the door was tried softly, and then there was a gentle tapping on the panel.

"May my money prove a curse to him, and the whole place constantly remind him of his treachery," he muttered, as the soft tapping was repeated, and a low voice, which he did not recognise, said:

"Dr. North—Dr. North! Can I speak to you a minute?"

He made no answer, but drew back to the table.

"Will they dare to break in?" he said to himself, as his face wore a look of bitter scorn and contempt.

Just then Mrs. Milt's voice could be heard raised loudly in protest; but it was in vain. Cousin Thompson, under the pretext of holding a parley, had entrapped her in the dining-room, and then interposed his person whenever she attempted to leave by door or window.

The tapping at the door ceased, and there was a sound of whispering; whilst a minute after a stoutly-built, rather hard-faced man, with a determined look, suddenly appeared at the French window looking on the garden, and tried the handle.

It was fast on the inside.

He passed on and went round to the surgery door, which he tried, too; but North had fastened this when he let Dally out, and the man came back, looked in and tapped gently on the pane to take North's attention. Then seeing that he did not stir from where he stood at the table, the man smiled and beckoned to him.

This he repeated again and again, but North did not stir. Then his lips moved, and he involuntarily repeated Hamlet's words:

"I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a hernshaw."

The man nodded and smiled again, and passed away.

There was another low murmuring outside

the door, and a fresh tapping, as a persuasive voice said:

"Dr. North, will you be kind enough to open the door, and come into the dining-room? Mrs. Milt, the housekeeper, would like to speak to you."

"What a child—what a weak lunatic they must think me!" muttered North; but he did not move, and, as he fully expected, the last speaker, as he supposed, went round to the window and tapped softly.

The fresh comer might have been twin brother of the first, so similar was his expression, so exactly a repetition were his acts.

They were of as much avail, and he returned to the hall, when a few words were exchanged in a low tone of voice, followed by a sharp tapping at the dining-room door.

This was opened, and Mrs. Milt's voice rose loudly:

"Stop me if you dare, any of you! and I'll have the law of you."

This was followed by a sharp, rustling

noise, and the dull thud made by the banging of the baize door.

Then there was the sound of the gravel as some one walked over it hurriedly, and the clicking of the swing-gate before it caught.

"Give the word, sir, and it's done," said a deep voice.

"Quick, then!" said Cousin Thompson sharply. "Quick, before that cursed woman returns with help."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE WAY OF ESCAPE.

North drew a deep breath as one of the men stationed himself at the study window and looked in.

He strode towards him, and the man smiled and beckoned to him to come out; but the smile became a scowl as the cord was seized and the blind drawn down.

Just then the door cracked as some one pressed it hard, and then a whispering penetrated to where North stood looking round before crossing to the surgery, entering, and locking himself in.

His first act was to go to the window, where he expected to find that there was another sentry; but window and outer door

faced in another direction, and were shut off from the part of the garden where the man stood by a dense patch of ancient shrubbery and a tall yew hedge.

North felt perfectly calm now, but his soul was full of a terrible despair.

He told himself that for him hope was dead; that in dealing with the occult secrets of Nature he had nearly mastered that which he wished to discover, but had failed, and must pay the penalty; while in the future some more fortunate student would profit by that which he had done; and, avoiding the pitfall into which he had fallen, take another turning and triumph.

To this end in the hours of his misery—when it had seemed to him that the strange essence which pervaded him slept—he had committed to paper the whole history of his experiments, from the first start to the time when he had awakened to the fact that he could no longer arrest the decomposition of the important organs, or do more than make a kind of mummy of his subject; but the essence or spirit was, as it were, taken

captive, and at the same time held him in thrall.

This, to the most extreme point, he had carefully written out, showing, in addition, the time when he felt that he must have gone wrong, as that where a different course must be pursued by the daring scientist who would venture so much in the great cause.

For he wrote clearly and impressively: failure meant such a fate as his, the constant presence of the spirit of the person who had died, and with it the being compelled to suffer for every wild act or speech this essence would do or make. He told how helpless he was, how he had striven to bring scientific knowledge to bear, fought with his position as a man should who was in the full possession of his faculties, but that he could do no more.

Success meant a crown of triumphant honour; failure, a kind of sane madness, whose only end could be death—a death he was compelled to seek to save himself at once —to save himself from being treated as a

maniac, and then to spend a few weeks or months of torture which he knew he could not bear.

In his last paragraphs he pointed out his position. He was believed to be mad, and to clear himself he would have to explain his experiment and his abnormal position, which he owned that no one would or could be expected to believe, save such a *savant* as the one he addressed—a man who had made the brain his study, and who could feel for the sufferings of the writer.

This letter was enclosed in the packet addressed to his executors for delivery to Mr. Delton, and lay in the study, waiting till those executors should receive the last commands.

All was at an end now, and with a feeling of calmness approaching to content, Horace North looked round his surgery with its many familiar objects ; and without the slightest feeling of dread took down a small medicine glass from the set standing all ready upon a shelf, and then lifted a large bottle from one particular spot at the end

where it always stood, veiling a little recess wherein were a couple of smaller bottles, carefully labelled and marked as to their degree of strength.

"Is it cowardly?" he said quietly. "Is it a sin? Surely not, when I know my position, and—yes, that is my fate."

For at that moment there was a sharp crack: the door had yielded, and he knew that his cousin's emissaries—the people from some private asylum—had forced their way into the study, and their next step would be to make their way to where he was.

He could have opened the door, and fled by way of the meadows; but where? To whom? Perhaps at the moment when he made his first appeal for help, the living shadow that he had, as it were, taken to him, would utter some wild cry or absurd jest, and people would believe his pursuers in spite of all that he could declare.

No, it was not cowardice, this hastening of his end; and, withdrawing the stopper, he began pouring out the liquid contents of the little bottle, as the handle of the surgery door

was turned, and the panel gave an ominous crack.

"You shall let me pass away in peace," he said quietly, as he drew away a chair which propped back an inner door of baize, let it swing to, and thrust in both its bolts.

"Cousin Thompson," he said bitterly, "you were always a miserable wretch, but I withdraw my curse. Take all, and enjoy your wretched life as well as such a reptile can."

He paused for a few moments, with his lips moving slowly, and a calm look of resignation softening the harsh austerities of his face.

"To forgiveness!" he said softly. "To oblivion!" and he raised the glass to his lips.

CHAPTER XIX.

VISION OR REAL.

The shivering of glass as the fragments of a pane fell tinkling upon the carpet.

The shivering of glass as the little crystal fell from Horace North's hand, and a pungent odour filled the room.

"Mary Salis! or am I mad indeed?" ejaculated the wretched man.

He stood motionless, staring at the window as a white arm was forced through the broken glass, and the catch thrust back, but not so quickly but that a deep red stain had time to show; for the jagged glass made an ugly gash above the white wrist, though it was unheeded, and the casement was flung open.

"The door—open that door!"

North did not stir, but stood gazing wildly at the pallid face before him, and then he passed his hands across his eyes and tottered to the window, as if drawn there by the eyes which gazed into his.

"Quick! the door—open this door!" was panted forth.

He obeyed mechanically without taking his eyes from the window, feeling his way to the door, and slowly opening it, to stand gazing at Mary Salis, as she caught his hands in hers.

"What were you going to do?" she cried piteously. "You, too, of all men! You must be mad—you must be mad!"

"Yes," he said vacantly; "they say so. I must be mad, or is—is it past—a dream? Mary Salis—you!"

"What's that?" cried Mary excitedly, as the sound of the breaking door was heard.

North uttered a sigh.

"They are coming," he cried, "and I shall be too late. Loose my arm—loose my arm!"

"No, no, no!" panted Mary, as she flung herself upon his breast. "It is what I feared; I believed it, and I came. Oh, for pity's sake, don't do that!"

"Yes: I must. You do not know," he whispered hoarsely, as he tried to unlace her arms from about him.

"Yes, I know that you were about to commit self-murder, and you shall not do this thing," cried Mary wildly.

"Would you see me dragged away to a living death?" he said. "Listen—do you not hear? Loose me, I say!"

He spoke almost savagely now, as he struggled to get the enlacing hands away; but, as he tore at them, Mary clung the closer, drawing herself more tightly to his breast as her face approached his, and her lips parted, her eyes dilated, and she cried as wildly:

"Then kill me too!"

He ceased struggling to look at the flushed, love-illumined face that approached his, unable to grasp the whole meaning of what was said, mentally incapable of in-

terpreting the words and looks, the whole scene being like the phantasm of some delirious fit.

A louder crack of the baize door aroused him, and he started away.

"Don't you hear?" he whispered. "Don't you hear?"

"Yes," cried Mary, still clinging to him; "I hear, and it is help."

"No, no!" he whispered; "it is those men. Ah, I am too late!"

For at that moment there was a sharp rustling of the bushes, and a man ran up over the lawn, to pause bewildered at the scene before him.

"You, miss—here?" he panted breathlessly. "Old Missus Milt said as the maddus folk was taking the doctor away."

"What?" cried Mary; and a mist floated before her eyes.

"The maddus folk, miss; and they've got a carriage round the front."

With a strength that was almost superhuman, Mary recovered herself, and grasping the situation, she whispered to North:

"Is this true?"

"Listen," he said.

Mary clung to him tightly as the sounds of the doors being forced bore unanswerable witness to the words; and then, as if to shield him from the threatened danger, she thrust him from her and followed across the surgery.

"No, no!" she panted. "Quick, before it is too late."

"Go?" he said, in answer to her frenzied appeal.

"Yes, yes; quick—quick! The garden —the meadows."

North seemed dazed, but Joe Chegg, who had run excitedly to the Manor after meeting the old housekeeper, more with the idea of seeing what was going on than affording help, now caught North's arm and hurried him out of the surgery and down the nearest path, then in and out among the dense shrubs, so that they were well out of sight before the door yielded, and Cousin Thompson's emissaries found their prey had gone.

North made no opposition to the efforts of those who held him on either side; but, weak with long fasting, and now utterly dazed, he staggered from time to time, and would have fallen but for the sustaining arms.

"Rect'ry, miss? All right," said Joe Chegg. "Hold up, sir, or you'll be down."

For North had made a lurch, and clung wildly to the sturdy young fellow.

"Oh, try—pray try!" moaned Mary, as she gazed back. "Now; I'll help all I can."

"I'll manage him," said Joe, who took the appeal to himself. "You let him lean on me. Why, I thought, miss, as how you couldn't walk."

"Hush! don't speak. They may hear us," whispered Mary, gazing fearfully back as they pressed on through the meadows with the bottom of the Rectory garden still a couple of hundred yards away, when, as Mary glanced sidewise at North, she saw his eyes close, and at the same moment his legs gave way, and he sank towards the grass.

Mary uttered a piteous groan and gazed at Chegg, who had loosened his hold on North's arm, and now stood with hat raised, scratching his head.

"Now, if some one else was here," he muttered; and then, in answer to an unspoken question, he cried aloud: "Well, I d'know, miss; but, anyhow, I'll try."

A life of toil had made the young fellow's muscles pretty tough, or else he could not have risen so sturdily after kneeling down, and, contriving to get North upon his shoulder, to start off once more, with Mary urging him to use every exertion, for a shout from behind had thrilled her, and on looking back it was to see two men coming along the meadow at a quick trot, while a third was walking swiftly behind.

CHAPTER XX.

A RACE FOR LIBERTY.

It was a close race, and Mary Salis felt that, ere many minutes had passed, the strange force which had nerved her so that she had traversed the distance between the two houses, and then enabled her to go through the scene which followed, would fail; but still she struggled on, with their pursuers gaining so rapidly that the gate which gave upon the meadows had hardly been passed and dashed to, and the feeling that at last they were in comparative safety, given her fresh strength, when the two keepers came up, and without hesitation threw open the gate, and followed into the Rectory orchard.

Joe Chegg had lowered his burden on to the ground as the men reached the gate.

"What'll I do, miss?"

"Stand by me," panted Mary, stooping to catch Horace's hand in hers; and then, sinking on one knee, she held to it tightly with both her own.

"Stand by you, miss?" cried Joe. "Yes; I'll do that; but you run and call for help."

"No, no," cried Mary; "I will not go."

"Now, then," cried Joe, "what is it? You know you're a-trespassing here?"

"You get out," growled one of the men; and he thrust the sturdy young fellow roughly aside.

It was a mistake on the keeper's part, for Joe Chegg's father was a Bilston man, notorious in his time for the pugnacity of his life.

His mantle, or rather his disposition to take off his coat, had fallen upon his son, and the result of the rude thrust was that Joe Chegg rebounded so violently that the keeper went staggering back, and by the

time he recovered, and his companion was about to join in the attack, Joe had proved himself to be the son of his father, for his coat was lying on the ground.

This was awkward. The keepers were accustomed to tussles with insane patients, and they were ready for a fight with Horace North, and to do anything to force him into the carriage waiting at the Manor House. But Joe Chegg was sane, sturdy, and had begun to square.

A fight with the stout young Warwick man was not in their instructions, and they called a parley.

"Look here, miss," said the one who had been struck surlily; "just call your bull-dog off. We don't want no trouble, and you're doing a very foolish thing; so let us do our dooty and go."

As he spoke he advanced, but a feint from Joe made him flinch, though he gave the young fellow a very ugly look.

"This is an outrage," cried Mary, rising and speaking now firmly. "What does it mean?"

"It means, madam," said a voice, as the tall, dark medical man who had visited twice at the Manor now came upon the scene, after a very hurried walk through the meadows—"it means, madam," he repeated, for he was breathless, "that Dr. North is not in a fit condition to be at large."

"It is not true!" cried Mary indignantly; though the recollection of what she had witnessed made her quail.

"It is quite true, madam; and his nearest friends have taken steps to have him placed under proper treatment, where he can be restored to health."

"Where what little reason left to him will be wrecked," something seemed to say within Mary; and she held on more tightly to North's hand.

"There, madam," said the doctor; "I have explained this to you, but I will also add, so that there may be no further unpleasantry, that all these steps have been taken after proper advice, and in strict legal manner. Now, be kind enough to let my men assist the patient to rise, and let us get

this sad matter settled as quickly as we can."

Mary wavered, and the doctor saw it.

"Jones," he said, "you go and get the carriage round here. It will be much the shortest way."

"Dr. North is a very old and dear friend of ours," said Mary, recovering herself, and speaking with dignity; "and I cannot stand by, in my brother's absence, and see what seems to me to be an outrage committed."

"Ah, your brother is away," said the doctor. "It is a pity, for gentlemen are better to deal with than ladies in a case like this. There, my dear madam, pray accept my assurances that everything is right, and that Dr. North will be taken the greatest care of, and restored to you soon perfectly sane and well. Pray be good enough to stand aside."

"No," cried Mary firmly; "he shall not go."

"Just say the word, miss," whispered Joe Chegg.

"Jones!" shouted the doctor; "come back!"

The second keeper, who was nearly through the orchard, came back, and it was a case of three to one; but Joe Chegg was not intimidated.

"Look here," he said. "Miss Salis says he isn't to go, and you're trespassing here. Hi! you Dally Watlock!" he shouted, as he caught sight of the little maid coming down the orchard; "you let loose that there dog."

Dally hesitated while, in response to a word from the doctor, the keepers advanced; and they would have succeeded in their task —Joe Chegg's brave efforts being doomed to failure by the baffling movements of the well-dressed doctor, whom he hesitated to strike— but succour arrived in the person of Salis, who came running down the orchard, red-faced and excited.

The odds were so reduced that a fresh parley ensued, the doctor giving his explanations now once more in answer to the indignant questions of Salis:

"How dare you insult my sister?" followed by another, "How dare you insult my friend?"

"Law or no law, sir," cried Salis, at last, "Dr. North is on my premises, where, so to speak, he has taken sanctuary. You are acting at the wish of Mr. Thompson?"

The doctor bowed.

"Then fetch Mr. Thompson here."

"Really, sir——" began the doctor.

"That will do, sir," cried Salis. "You have heard my decision. If the law forces me to give up my friend, I may be compelled; but I will not give him up to you and these men now. Chegg, see these persons off the Rectory grounds."

There was no help for it. A struggle would have resulted in the raising of the village, and, shrugging his shoulders, the doctor beat an ignominious retreat with his men.

"Mary!" exclaimed Salis, now for the first time realising the miracle that seemed to have occurred; "is this you?"

The poor girl did not speak, but stood

gazing at him with her eyes growing dim, while before he could catch her she sank, first upon her knees, and then forward with her head upon North's breast, while her soft, fair hair escaped from the bands which held it, and fell loosely about her marble face.

CHAPTER XXI.

CLEANING A ROOM.

EARLIER on that day Dally sat in her bedroom watching from the window, as she had often watched before when it was night.

Her little, rosy face was a study, and her dark eyes glistened like those of an eager rat.

She had well calculated her time, and before long saw Leo come out, book in hand, for her customary walk up and down the garden.

Dally wasted no time, but hurried to Mary's room to listen for a few moments, and then steal into Leo's, where she peered in for a moment, and then hurried out to return

with a dustpan and brush and a duster. These she placed upon chair and floor to cover her appearance should Leo return ; while, after a rummage in her pocket, she brought out a little key.

Before using this she darted to the window, and waited till she could see Leo going from the house, when, with rat-like action, she made for a chest of drawers, upon which stood a desk, opened it with the speed of one accustomed to the task, and lifting one side, thrust in her hand, to draw out a packet of letters tied with a ribbon.

The top one bore a postmark only two days old, and this the girl drew out, skimmed over as rapidly as her illiterate brain would allow, and as she read her countenance changed again and again.

"Ah!" she ejaculated, at last. "You would, would you?" and taking up a pencil from the tray, and a new envelope, she laboriously copied out what seemed to be an address.

Then, with a smile of triumph, she

hurriedly refolded the letter and replaced it in the packet, thrust the newly addressed envelope in her bosom, re-locked the desk, and had hardly destroyed all signs of her action, when she heard a slight cough.

Dally ran more rat-like than ever to the place where the dustpan and brush lay, plumped down on her knees, and began to work with her back to the door, humming away in a low tone as busily as could be amongst the dust she raised.

"Dally!" cried Leo, opening the door.

"Yes, miss."

"Oh, what a dreadful dust! You know I don't like this unnecessary sweeping going on."

"But it wanted doing so badly, miss, and you were gone out in the garden."

"Yes, yes; but leave off, that's a good girl, now. I want to sit down and read."

"Yes, miss," said Dally, hurriedly using the duster.

"Do you know where my brother has gone?"

"No, miss; don't you?"

"No," said Leo wearily.

"Oh, yes, I do, miss; he went to the Manor House, and then he come back to Miss Mary, and I think now he's gone to King's Hampton."

"Oh," said Leo wearily. "That will do; and don't come to tidy up my room again without asking leave."

"No, miss," said Dally, retreating and going back to her own room, where she threw her housemaid's utensils on the bed, and took out and read the address on the envelope, "Telacot's Hotel, Craven Street, Strand."

"Don't you be afraid, miss," she muttered, "I won't tidy up your room again. Oh, what treachery there is in this world! But wait, my dear, and you shall see!"

She replaced the envelope, and stood thinking for a few moments before coming to a decision, and then—

"I haven't been there dozens of time for gran'fa for nothing," she said, half aloud. "I know, and I will.

"But suppose——

"He wouldn't," she said, after a pause. "They say he never comes out of his room except at night—I will."

Five minutes after she was going down the garden ostensibly to pick that bunch of parsley, and to obtain it she went to the very bottom of the kitchen garden, and thence into the meadows, through which she almost ran till she reached the bottom of the Manor House grounds, and then, knowing the place as she had from childhood, she easily made her way, unseen, to the surgery, to be found by North.

Dally returned triumphantly, but she did not take the brandy to her grandfather, but deposited it in her box in the bedroom before going about her work as calmly as if she had nothing more important in her mind than dusters and brooms, and the keeping tidy of the portions of the Rectory within her province.

But nothing missed her piercing little eyes, which seemed to glitter as the various matters occurred, and in the intervals she packed a few necessaries in a large reticule

bag, which she hung over the iron knob of her bedstead in company with her jacket and hat.

No servant could have been more attentive, or apparently innocent-looking as she stared at Joe Chegg, who, after helping Salis to bear North into the drawing-room, was relegated to the kitchen to be refreshed.

Joe stared hard at her with an indignant frown, as he slowly ground up masses of bread and cheese, and washed them down with copious draughts of ale.

But Joe's frowns had no effect upon Dally, and her aspect was simplicity itself, as, after a time, he took to shaking his head at her solemnly, following up each shake of the head with a sigh, and then apparently easing his sufferings by an angry bite at the bread.

Each time Joe looked and frowned, Dally replied with a simple, innocent maiden's round-eyed, wondering gaze, which seemed to ask why he did not speak and say what he had to say.

But Joe Chegg said nothing, only ate,

and frowned, and shook his head till he had done; and after a time Dally, having nothing else to do, thrust a little plump hand right down a black stocking till her knuckles represented the heel which had been peering through a large hole, and then and there she began to make worsted trellis-work which looked to Joe Chegg very similar to what he had often done in wood.

The drawing-room bell rang, but before Dally could answer it, Salis appeared at the door.

"Don't go away, Chegg, my lad," he said. "I don't know what visitors may come, and I should like you to hang about the place and watch."

"Well, you see, sir," said Joe sturdily, "there's a man's time."

"Oh, yes," said Salis, smiling; "you shall be paid double time."

"For how long, sir?"

"Wait and see; and keep a good look-out about the premises."

He said these words as he was leaving the kitchen door, and met Leo in the hall,

directly after, with her handsome eyes looking at him inquiringly.

It was observable, too, in the kitchen that Dally's countenance looked a little more intent and she bent a little more over her stocking, and began to hum as she darned, while Joe Chegg took up the ale mug, and, after looking into it meditatively, began to work the table-spoonful left at the bottom round and round as if he were preparing an experiment whose aim was to keep one little blot of froth right in the centre like a tiny island of foam in a small sea of beer.

"Yes; I'll watch," he said to the mug; "and it won't be the first time. It arn't much goes on as I don't see."

Dally hummed and ceased to look cat-like in her quiescence, for her aspect was kittenish now, and her hum deepened every now and then into a purr.

"Strange things goes on in this here village," continued Joe, gazing into the mug; "and I sees a deal of what young ladies and persons does."

Dally's purr would now have done credit

to a Persian puss : it was so soft and pleasant and round.

"But of all the things as ever I've see o' young ladies, I never see aught as ekalled the way as Miss Mary's got strong and well."

Dally hummed now, and her tones were those of a musical bee, while the trellis-work in the stocking grew and grew.

"Well," said Joe, after getting the drop of froth to stand very high out of its beery whirlpool, "I'm a-goin' to play policeman now."

He tossed the remainder of the beer into his throat, and set down the mug.

"There arn't many jobs as comes amiss to me."

He rose and walked out of the kitchen, and as Dally saw him from the window on his way round to the front, she gave her stocking-covered fist a dab down on the table and uttered an angry "*Ugh!*"

Joe Chegg was not playing policeman long before he ran to the front door and knocked.

"Mist—Salis, sir! Mist—Salis. Here's one on 'em."

Salis was with North, and did not hear, so that when a keen old gentleman with white hair alighted from a fly, it was to find the door barred by the sturdy young workman.

"Is Dr. North here?"

"What do you want with Dr. North?" cried Joe surlily.

"I am a medical man, my lad," said the old gentleman, smiling. "I have come down from London to see him."

"Yes, I thought you had," said Joe; "and you can't see him, so you may just go back, as the t'others have done before. Eh? Oh, I beg pardon, sir. I thought it was the wrong sort."

For Salis, hearing the altercation, had hurried out, and a brief explanation had set all straight.

"Poor fellow, poor fellow!" said the doctor, after following Salis into his room and hearing an explanation of the case. "Overwrought, I suppose. Well, let's see him."

They went to the darkened drawing-room to pause at the door, the doctor making a sign to Salis to stay while he watched the patient, who was ignorant of his presence.

North was lying back on the sofa with his eyes nearly closed, and Mary seated near, holding his hand, and bent towards him as if listening to his breathing.

Suddenly he started—crying out wildly as his eyes opened with a dilated stare; but as he tried to rise, Mary's soft white hand was laid upon his forehead, and he sank back with a sigh of restfulness; his eyes closed again, and he lay breathing calmly.

Salis looked at Mr. Delton, but the old man did not stir. Here was the case developing itself before him, and he could not study it better than unobserved.

Salis was about to re-enter the room, when Dally came and summoned him by pulling his sleeve.

"What is it?" he said sharply, as he turned.

"Mrs. Milt, to see you, sir."

Salis hesitated.

"I will wait till you return," whispered the old doctor. "I am well employed."

Salis hurried to where the old housekeeper was waiting.

"I've just heard that master is here, sir," cried the old woman excitedly. "Oh, I am thankful! I found these papers in the study, sir; they were in an envelope directed to me, sir, and this one for the doctor master knows in London."

Salis uttered a cry of joy.

"Mr. Delton is with your master," he said.

Mrs. Milt sighed.

"Let me go to him, sir, please."

Salis signed to her to follow, and led the way to where North lay now as if asleep, with Mary's hand held to his brow.

The old housekeeper stood for a few moments watching, and then drew back.

"No, sir," she said; "I won't disturb him. I haven't seen him look like that for weeks."

"And I will not disturb him," said the old doctor. "Rest like that must be good."

He followed Salis into the dining-room, where he sat down to read the communication North had written, and after studying it carefully for some time, he looked up to find the curate's eyes fixed upon him intently.

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. Salis, I think I can say a comforting word or two. By the way, I thought I would come on straight to you instead of calling first at the Manor House, and it is as well I did."

"But the letter, sir—the letter from my poor friend?"

"Ah, yes, the letter," said the old doctor dreamily. "I have read and studied it well."

"And you think?"

"A great deal, my dear sir—a great deal; but I have not finished yet. A clear case of overtaxed brain. I should say that he had worked himself into a state of exhaustion, and then some shock must have occurred to destroy the tottering balance. Not a money trouble, for I think Mr. North is well off.

Not a love trouble, for judging from what I saw——"

"You are mistaken in that, sir," said Salis. "My poor friend suffered a grievous shock a short time since."

"Ah! just as I expected. That is quite sufficient to account for it all."

"But the future, sir? For goodness' sake, speak! Your reticence tortures me."

"I beg your pardon. I am thoughtful and slow, Mr. Salis. Let me try and set you at rest. As far as I can judge without further study of the case, I should say that you need be under very little uneasiness."

"You do not consider his case necessitates his being placed in a private asylum?"

"I should say the people who placed him in one deserved to be hanged. Well, no," he added, smiling; "not so bad as that, but to be placed in a private asylum themselves."

"Thank God!" said Salis fervently, and the tears stood in his eyes as he grasped the old doctor's hands.

The evening was growing old as Mr. Delton sat facing Salis in his study, nursing

his knee, and calmly watching the curate smoking his one per diem cigar.

"No," said the old man, smiling; "I rarely smoke now; but North was right; it is good for you. I don't mind a bit. Pray go on."

So Salis smoked and sat talking with the tea-things on the table.

Leo had begged to be excused. The excitement had upset her, she said, and she was in her room, where Dally had taken her up some tea, and paused for some moments on the landing, in the dark, to set the saucer down upon the large window sill, and as she bent over the tray a faint gurgling sound was heard, and click as of glass against glass.

The doctor had been in twice to see North, who was sleeping heavily, with Mary and the old housekeeper seated by him, the lamp being shaded and placed where the light could not trouble the patient; and, after a stormy day, all seemed to have settled down to calm repose.

"My dear sir," said the doctor, "it is not

the first time that Nature has performed a miracle of this kind. Your sister's nervous excitement did what we doctors were unable to perform — triumphed over the inert muscles. They obeyed; the latent force was set in action, and she rose from her couch to go to her poor friend's help— in time to save him from a very terrible fate, whether that fate was the private asylum, or that which he had evidently in mind. Poor fellow! I wish I had seen him sooner. No; it is better as it is, and he will say so when we have him once more himself."

"Then you really do feel hopeful?"

"My dear Mr. Salis," said the old man, 'if I am not wrong in my ideas, that sweet-faced lady in the next room will slowly and patiently repay our poor friend for unknowingly restoring her to a life of activity. She will bring him back to calm reason."

"You think this?" said Salis hoarsely.

"Indeed I do. His long and lucid statement to me shows that in every point but one he was as sane as you or I. He

had one little crotchet, due to the overstrain, and that will, I feel sure, with a little help, soon disappear. Mr. Salis, take my word for it, you may be perfectly at rest."

"Good heavens!" cried Salis, springing to his feet, for at that moment a wild shriek resounded through the house, followed by a heavy fall in the room above.

CHAPTER XXII.

MISSING THE MAIL TRAIN.

Ten o'clock had just struck, and the old tower was still vibrating, when Dally Watlock's bedroom door was softly opened, and the little lady, clad in her tightly-fitting jacket and natty hat, came softly out, to stand upon the landing listening.

The lamp was burning on the hall table, and it sent up a faint yellow glow which shone strangely upon the girl's face, as she stood listening to the murmur of voices proceeding from the curate's study, and she could just make out a faint line of light coming from beneath the drawing-room door.

Dally went slowly and softly across the

landing till she reached Leo's door, where she paused to listen; but all was perfectly still, and stealing one gloved hand to the latch, she tried the door cautiously, but it did not yield, and though she tapped twice there was no response.

Dally drew her breath softly between her teeth, and uttered a low, vicious little laugh.

"Good night, dear," she said softly; "it'll be ten o'clock to-morrow when you wake, and then—we shall see!"

One of the stairs gave a loud warning creak as she stopped, bag in hand, holding on by the balustrade, and ready, rat-like, to dart back to her room should any one open the study door.

But the murmur of voices still went on, and Dally stole down the rest of the way to reach the hall, creep softly to a swing-door, and pass through into the neatly-kept kitchen, where a fire still glowed and a kettle sang its own particular song.

Dally closed the kitchen door after her, darted across the broad patch of warm light cast by the fire into the darkness of a scullery

beyond, and closed a door after her to stand thinking.

"Craven Street, Strand," she muttered. "Ten miles to King's Hampton. Ten o'clock to half-past one; I can do it easy, and at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, my dear, we shall see!"

She said these words with a vicious little hiss, and the next minute two well-oiled bolts were shot, the key was turned, the door opened with a sharp crack, and then there was a rustle as Dally passed through, closed the door with a light click of the latch, and stood in the semi-darkness of a soft starlight night.

Drawing a long breath, as if to get a reserve of force, the girl stepped quickly along the path leading round to the front, passing as soon as she could on to the closely-cut lawn, and over it to the gate.

She had nearly reached it, bag in one hand and umbrella in the other, when she turned quickly round to see that she was not observed by any one in the curate's study; and as she

did so she plumped up against something hard and yet soft.

"Oh!" she involuntarily ejaculated, and she started back, as that which she had thumped against took a step forward, and she found that she was face to face with Joe Chegg.

"Where are you going?" he said sourly.

Dally was too much startled for a moment to speak. Then, recovering herself, she said shortly:

"What's that to you?"

"Heverything," replied Joe, in a low growl. "Parson said I was to look out about the place; and I'm a-looking. Where are you going?"

Dally drew her breath with a hiss. It was maddening to be stopped at a time like this, when every minute was of importance; and the mail train was always punctual at King's Hampton at half-past one.

"D'yer hear?" said Joe. "Well, if you won't answer me, come on to parson, and tell him."

"No, no, Joe Chegg; don't stop me, please," she said softly. "Gran'fa's ill, and I'm going to take him something."

"At quarter arter ten, eh? No, you arn't. Old Moredock went to bed at half-past eight, for I run down and looked in at his windy 'fore he drawed the blind. Yes, I run down and see."

"What's that got to do with it?" cried Dally. "How dare you stop me?"

"Parson said I was to look out."

"Master didn't tell you to stop me, you great stupid. Let me go by."

"Nay, I shan't," said Joe. "You're off on larks, and he arn't here now."

"Who isn't here?" cried Dally.

"You know. He's gone to London, where he'd better stop."

Dally's wrath hissed again, and she was about to say something angrily, but she dreaded a scene, and tried the other tack.

"Now, don't be foolish, there's a dear, good man," she said softly. "I just want to go a little way."

"Wi' an umbrella and a bag, eh?" said Joe. "Parson Salis don't know you're off out, I know."

"What nonsense, Joe!"

"Don't you Joe me, ma'am; my name's Mr. Chegg, and you wouldn't whisper and carny and be civil if you weren't up to some games."

"Oh, what a foolish man you are, Joe Chegg!"

"Oh, I am, arn't I?" said Joe. "Always going up to the Hall of a night, eh? Gets out o' my bedroom windy, and steals off to meet squires in vestry rooms, I do, don't I?"

"Joe Chegg!"

"And carries on as no decent female would wi' my missus's young man."

"Joe Chegg! Oh, please let me go by," whispered Dally. "I want to go somewhere particular."

"Then want'll be your master, for you're not going without parson says you are to. Come on and ask him."

Joe caught her by the wrist, but she wrested it away, and nearly got through the gate, but he was too quick for her.

"That shows as you're up to no good," said Joe. "You wouldn't fight against seeing your master if you weren't off on the sly at half arter ten."

"Half-past ten!" cried Dally. "It isn't."

At that moment the chimes ran out the half-hour, and Dally drew her breath hard, and made a desperate effort to pass; but this time Joe caught her round the waist and held her, avoiding a scratched face from the fact that the girl's hands were gloved.

"How dare you?" she panted, ready to cry hysterically from vexation.

"I dare 'cause I'm told, and I don't believe I did right in letting Miss Leo go."

"What?"

Dally suddenly grew limp and ceased to struggle.

"I said I didn't think I did right in

letting Miss Leo go, but I didn't like to stop her."

"Miss Leo?" panted Dally. "When?"

"Hour and half ago."

"It's a story. She's fast asleep in bed."

"Where you ought to be," said Joe. "So back you go."

"It's a story, I say," panted Dally. "Miss Leo hasn't been out of her room to-night."

"Miss Leo went out of this here gate hour and half ago, just as I come back from your gran'father's, and she arn't come back."

"Oh!"

Dally uttered a low, hoarse cry, and turning sharply round ran swiftly back to the place from which she had come, closely followed by Joe, in whose face the door was closed and the bolt slipped.

In another minute Dally had reached the landing, and was listening at Leo's door, which she tried again.

All was still, and, her breath coming and going as if she were suppressing hysterical sobs, the girl ran into her bedroom, locked the door, threw bag, umbrella, hat and jacket on the bed, opened the window, crept out with wonderful activity, rolled down the sloping roof, dropped to the ground, and ran over the lawn to the summer-house.

Leo Salis had scaled that rustic edifice many a time with great agility, but her skill was poor in comparison with that of the sexton's grandchild. In a few moments she was on the roof, and reaching up to Leo's window, the casement yielding to her touch.

She uttered a low sob of rage and doubt now, as, without hesitation, she clambered in to run to the bed, and pass her hands over it.

Tenantless; and the cup of tea, heavily drugged with a solution of chloral, stood where it had been placed, untouched, upon the table.

Even then the girl was not convinced. She would not believe in the ill success of

her plans, and that the handsome woman she despised was as keen of wit as herself.

She darted to the wardrobe.

Leo's jacket was gone!

To another part of the room.

The hat she wore was missing!

Then for a moment the girl stood as if dumbfounded, as the thoughts crushed down upon her that even if she started now, and could get away, she would be too late to catch the London mail. Worse still: Leo must have caught the last up-train at twelve, and long before she could reach the great city, would have joined Tom Candlish at the place he had named in the note Dally herself had borne; and, though she had planned so well, her chances of being Lady Candlish were for ever gone.

She ground her teeth together and panted hoarsely, hardly able to breathe for the sobs which struggled for utterance.

"It isn't true. It's a trick!" she cried at last. "I won't believe it! I'll go and be there first, and then——

"Oh! what shall I do—what shall I do?" she cried hoarsely; and then, uttering a wild and passionate shriek of misery and despair, she threw herself heavily upon the floor, to tear at the carpet, like some savage creature, with tooth and nail.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DALLY'S HYSTERICS.

Salis ran out into the hall, followed by the doctor, to meet Mary and the housekeeper from the other side.

"North?" gasped Salis; he could say no more.

"Sleeping peacefully," said the housekeeper; "what is the matter?" For Mary could not speak.

"Leo must be ill," said Salis, rushing up the stairs to his sister's room.

"Leo! Leo!" he cried, rattling the door-handle.

For answer there was a moaning, almost inhuman, sound.

"Can you open the door?" said the old

doctor, who had followed him. "It must be a fit."

"Stand back," cried Salis; and going to the other side of the broad landing, he rushed forward, literally hurling himself at the door, which flew open with a crash.

The light carried by Mary streamed into the room, and lit up the figure grovelling upon the carpet.

In an instant Salis was down upon one knee, and had raised her upon his arm.

"Dally!" he cried wonderingly, as the girl writhed and fought and moaned in his arms.

The doctor glanced at the hysterical girl.

"Light here," he said sternly; and as Mary wonderingly bore forward the lamp, the old man lifted the tea-cup, upon which his eyes had instantly lit, smelled, and then cautiously tasted it.

He shook his head.

"Is she poisoned?" gasped Salis.

"No," said the old doctor promptly. "The lamp a little nearer, please."

Mary held it towards him, and the old man bent down over Dally and made a

rapid examination; no easy task, for she was throwing herself about wildly, and one hand struck the lamp shade and tore it away.

"That will do," said the doctor in stern, hard tones. "Here: have you another servant? Get her to bed at once."

As he spoke he seized Dally's wrist, and gave it a jerk.

"Get up!" he said harshly.

"What a shame!" murmured Mrs. Milt indignantly.

"Of this girl to make such a disturbance?" said the old doctor, who had caught her words. "Yes, disgraceful, when there is so much trouble. That's right; get up. Not your room, I suppose?"

To the surprise of all, Dally had risen, and stood with her hands clenched, looking wildly from one to the other.

"Can you walk to your room, Dally?" said Mary.

The girl nodded sharply, then looked around wildly, and the full force of her trouble coming back, she burst into a passion of tears.

"But where is Leo?" cried Salis. "Where is my sister?"

He darted to the open window and looked out.

"Want me, sir?" said a voice.

"You there, Chegg? How's that?"

"You telled me to watch, sir."

"Have you seen any one pass?"

"Only Miss Leo, sir," replied the man.

Salis turned from the window, looking as if stunned.

"Gone!" he said wonderingly.

"Yes," cried Dally, mingling her words with sobs of rage and spite. "She's gone off with Tom Candlish."

"And you—you wretch—you have helped her," cried Salis, seizing the girl by the arm.

"I didn't. It isn't true. I've done everything to keep 'em apart; but they've cheated and deceived me," cried Dally. "She's gone up to London to meet him—and—and they've gone there."

She tore an envelope from her pocket, and Salis snatched it from her hand to read the address in Craven Street.

"Hartley," whispered Mary, clinging to him now, "is it true?"

"Yes," he said hoarsely, "it must be true. Hush! I must leave you now. Mr. Delton, will you stay in the house, and watch over my sister and my friend? I must go away at once."

"There's no train till to-morrow morning at eight," sobbed Dally passionately; and she stamped her feet like an angry child as her hysterical fit began to return.

"That will do!" said the old doctor sternly, as he grasped the girl's wrist once more, and she looked up at him in a startled way, and then quailed and subsided into a fit of sobbing.

"Anything I can do, Mr. Salis, you may depend on being done."

Salis nodded; he could not speak for a moment, but gazed full in his sister's eyes.

"Did you suspect this?" he whispered.

"Oh, no, Hartley," she replied.

"No; you could not have suspected."

He drew a long breath, and seemed to be making an effort to check his agony of

spirit, and to be forcing himself to act firmly.

"Chegg," he cried from the window, "go round to the front door. I'll meet you there. Mrs. Milt," he said, closing the window, "will you be good enough to see this girl to her room? Stay with her for the present. Mary, poor North is alone," he added; "go down."

"And you, Hartley?"

"I'll follow directly," he said; and as soon as the room was cleared, he turned to the old doctor.

"You tasted that tea," he said sharply.

"Yes; strongly flavoured with chloral," he said.

"Chloral? How could that have got into the tea? And the girl's fit? Not epilepsy?"

"Hysteria. Rage and disappointment," said the old doctor. "So it seems to me. There is more beneath the surface than appears. Mr. Salis, what can I do to help you?"

"Give me your prayers and ask me nothing," he replied sadly. "There is more beneath the surface, sir."

"I will respect your silence," said the old man, taking his hand. "You are Horace North's friend, sir, and that is sufficient for me. You are going to town?"

Salis nodded.

"My house is at your disposal," said the doctor, and he handed Salis his card.

At five o'clock, after due arrangements had been made, Joe Chegg was at the door with a chaise, ready to drive Salis over to the station at King's Hampton; but, long before that, Dally had begged Mrs. Milt to "fetch Miss Mary," to whom the half-wild, sobbing girl had made a clean breast of all she knew, and this had been communicated to the curate.

"I need not fear leaving North—I mean on my sister's behalf?" said Salis, as he stood by the chaise.

"Trust to me, my dear sir, and go without fear."

Salis climbed into the chaise, and, with his head bent, was driven off through the chilly morning air in search of the fugitive who had nine hours' start; and as he recalled this he muttered:

"I am too late!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUT OF THE SHADOW.

Hartley Salis found that his words were correct.

He was too late!

He learned that "a gentleman," as the people at the hotel called him, had been staying at the hotel, that a lady, evidently Leo, had come in by the early train, and that they had gone.

"Heaven only knows where, Mary, dear," said Salis a week later, as he lay upon the couch, utterly worn out with his efforts to trace the fugitives. "I am broken down. Thank God, dear, I am once more at home. And you?"

"My dearest brother," she said tenderly,

as she knelt beside him and laid her hand upon his burning brow.

"Ah, that's cool and pleasant," he sighed, with his eyes closed. "Tell me about North —more than your letters said."

"He is better—much better," said Mary, with an eagerness she made no attempt to conceal.

"Yes," said Salis wearily; "so Mr. Delton said."

"Yes; so Mr. Delton said, and he also said, my dear sir, that you too must have rest; your sister, recovering from her own illness, cannot afford to have two invalids on her hands."

Salis looked up, and held out his hand to the old doctor, who had uttered the words softly, as doctors do: "You have hardly had a good night's rest since you left."

"I have not been to bed," said Salis simply. "There, I will try and sleep now."

The doctor made Mary a sign, and she drew back as Salis closed his eyes, and the breakfast which had been prepared as he drove in that morning from King's Hamp-

ton after travelling all night remained untasted.

That was at seven o'clock, and it was seven at night when he awoke to look sharply round, and see Mary at the head of the couch.

"I — where am ——? Have I been asleep?"

"Yes," said Mary softly.

"Hah!" he ejaculated, springing up. "I have done all I could, Mary," he said almost appealingly. "I think they are married. It's a proud thing for us, dear, to have a lady of title for sister," he added bitterly, as he took Mary to his heart, and she felt it throbbing with his emotion.

"There," he said, after a few minutes' struggle, "now for other duties. I still have you."

The pressure of Mary's hand spoke more than words, and the poor fellow sat at last, feeling that, after all, there were great compensations in life.

The sight of a well-dressed visitor coming up to the house interrupted their quiet

communion, just as they had felt that no more could be done respecting Leo, after Salis had been placed *au courant* with the state of affairs at the Rectory. Among others that Dally had been to and fro several times to see her grandfather, but had settled down to her work as of old.

In fact that young lady entered the room directly after the ringing of the gate bell, to state that Mrs. Berens was in the drawing-room, and wanted to see master "particklar."

"I will see her for you, Hartley," said Mary.

"No," replied Salis firmly; "I want work to keep my brain quiet, or I shall be ill. Show her in here, Dally."

"No, no, I will fetch her," said Mary, smiling at her brother's want of etiquette.

She left the room to return directly.

"Come and see her, Hartley," she said. "Poor woman, she is in sad trouble."

"Hah! I am glad," cried Salis. "Something to think about. The best medicine for me."

"Oh, Mr. Salis, what shall I do? What you have so often said!" sobbed Mrs. Berens,

as he entered the room, and she clung to his extended hand.

"What I have so often said?"

"Yes; about riches. I'm a poor, helpless woman now. All gone—all gone!"

It was a long story about how she had allowed herself to be influenced by Cousin Thompson, whom she had permitted to make investment after investment till he seemed to have got the whole of the widow's money into his hands.

"And all went so well till that day when I offended him, dear Mr. Salis. Since then I have had nothing but bad news about my property, and now I can get no answers from him at all."

"A scoundrel!" cried Salis; "but what day do you mean?"

"That day when—must I tell you everything?"

"If you wish for my help," said Salis sharply.

"I do, Mr. Salis; but pray don't speak angrily to me. I am so broken and unhappy now."

"My dear madam, I want to help you. Pray tell me all."

"He came down to me one day—I have the date somewhere — and he proposed to me. I refused him at once, for I quite disliked the man, and he went away my enemy, I'm sure, and when I heard of his conduct towards his cousin, I felt that I had had a narrow escape from a perfect fiend. And now, Mr. Salis, what shall I do?"

"The dog!" ejaculated Salis. "I'm longing for occupation; leave it to me, Mrs. Berens. I've been seeing a friend—my solicitor—in town about North's affair with his cousin; we'll work the two together, and if Mr. Thompson does not mind, he'll find himself in a strange fix."

Cousin Thompson did find himself in a strange fix, and what with threats of proceedings against him for conspiracy and fraud, he was very glad to compound matters in a way which restored two-thirds of her comfortable little fortune to Mrs. Berens.

What time these proceedings were going

on, North was gradually improving under Mr. Delton's care, though the old gentleman laughed, and said that the improvement was not due to him.

Certainly it was the case that when North had his often-recurring fits of imagination, when he was fully convinced that the essence of Luke Candlish was with him still, and he turned wild with horror, the touch of Mary Salis' soft, cool hand laid across his eyes, where he held it as a talisman, invariably exorcised the fancied spirit, and the ghost was laid.

From recurring daily and with terrible force, the fits came at last weekly, and then a month passed before one came, and that was slight.

Then more and more feeble, and then they came no more.

There could only be one result to such intercourse as this. Horace North gradually awakened to the fact that he had been blind as well as partly demented; but a year had elapsed before one day Salis and Mrs. Berens entered the Rectory drawing-room to find

Mary sobbing gently on the young doctor's breast, and heard her say:

"I always loved you from the first."

"Ah, Salis, you here?" said North, rising without a shade of discomposure on his face. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*, old fellow. I have been asking dear Mary if she will be my wife."

"My dear Horace," cried Salis, his face flushing with pleasure, "Heaven bless you both! I am glad: but—er—the fact is, I have been betrayed into asking Mrs. Berens —er—to——"

"Dear, dear Mary!" sobbed the homely, simple-hearted woman; "don't, don't be angry with me. I do love him so."

Another year had passed, but there had been nothing definite heard about Leo.

Then came a black-bordered envelope, with the direction in her hand, asking her brother to help her, for she was in terrible straits in London with her child. There was plenty of money to be had, she said, but everything was in confusion, and the agent of

Sir Thomas Candlish refused to acknowledge her as the late baronet's wife.

But the energy of Hartley Salis soon set this right.

For old Moredock's notion had proved to be correct. Tom Candlish had literally drunk himself to death, and the old man, who had been giving Horace North a good deal of trouble lately, and who was exceedingly fractious and jealous of his grandchild's young husband, his deputy at the church, suddenly perked up on hearing that "young Squire Tom" was to be brought down from London to the family mausoleum.

There was a grand funeral, and the old man, helped by Joe Chegg, got through his part of the business with a good deal of his old energy.

All was over, and Horace North, who had been one of the mourners, as brother-in-law of Lady Candlish of the Hall, was about to turn away, with his mind strongly exercised by the scene, and the recollections it evoked, when he started, for he felt his sleeve plucked.

He turned sharply round to find himself alone, gazing at the old sexton, as he gave him one of his ghoulish grins—more hideous than ever.

"Now, gran'fa," said a quick voice, and a rosy little woman, who had evidently been crying, took his arm, "you're tired out, and must come home. Joe will finish what's to be done."

"Go 'way! go 'way!" cried the old man angrily.

"No, no, dear; don't worrit Dr. North now. He'll come and see you another time."

"Go 'way! go 'way!" cried the old man again; and then, laying his hideous, gnarled hand upon the doctor's arm: "Don't want to try no more 'speriments, do you, doctor, eh?"

North looked at him wildly, and could hardly keep back a shudder.

"No, no, Moredock," he said, recovering himself.

"But you'll come and see me to-morrow, doctor, won't you?"

North nodded, and walked away to Salis, who was waiting for him at the vestry door, and they entered one of the carriages to return to the Hall, while, after watching them go, the old man seated himself upon the mausoleum steps, where he could watch while his new grandson and deputy finished his duty, and the great door was closed.

"Too terrible to attempt," muttered North to himself. "A narrow escape from a living death, but I still think that I was right."

"Ay, Joe; ay, Dally; doctor's a clever man, and I could tell you some strange tales about he; but no, no; no, no! Lock that gate quickly, and help me home. I'm a little stiff about the back. Lock him up, lad! lock him up! Now, Dally, let's get back. Another Candlish there; eh! my lady, eh!"

"Gran'fa!" cried Dally furiously; and the old man broke out into a chuckling laugh, which nearly killed him, and he had to sit down on a tomb and be patted on the back, and his collar loosened, and then helped

slowly home, looking very limp and strange, though with the doctor's help he managed to survive another year.

The night of the funeral, when the doctor and his young wife returned from the Hall, where the handsome young widow sat alone with her weak, sickly child, North had a return of his imaginative malady; but Mary's hand was talismanic still, and the shadow passed away, never to return.

THE END.

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